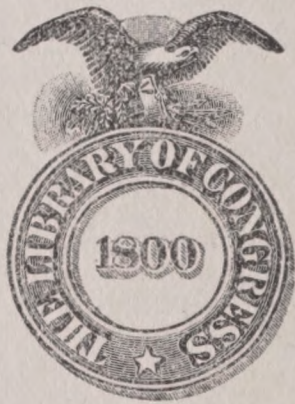


THE JOYOUS ADVENTURES OF JOHN AND BETTY



ELISABETH H. CHENEY

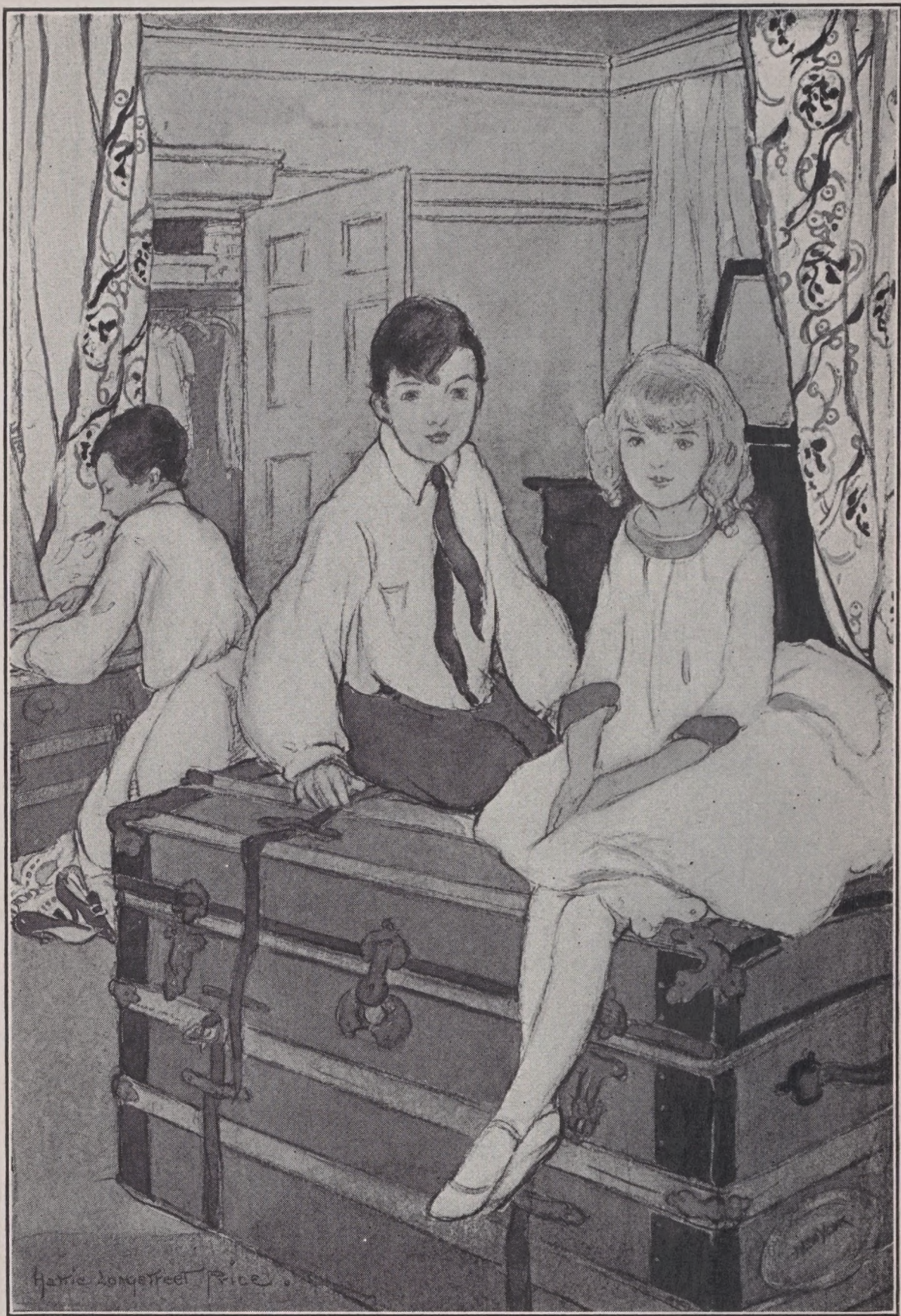


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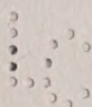


"WILL THERE BE TREES TO CLIMB"?

THE
JOYOUS ADVENTURES
OF JOHN AND BETTY

BY
ELISABETH H. CHENEY

Illustrated by
HATTIE LONGSTREET PRICE



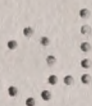
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The Joyous Adventures of John and Betty



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Introduction

“THE Joyous Adventures of John and Betty” begins the story of the interesting life of two of the most wide-awake American youngsters we have met in a long time.

Their father died when they were quite young and through the failure of a bank, their brave little mother was forced to earn a living for the two children and herself. This necessitated their moving to the country.

John and Betty accept more responsibility than is intended for them and help Mother make both ends meet.

How they start a candy route and how Christmas brings them all great happiness is told in this—the first volume of “John and Betty.”

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The Joyous Adventures of John and Betty

CHAPTER I

JOHN AND BETTY

JOHN and Betty Stamford were a brother and sister, who had always lived, as long as they could remember, in a big house in a big city with their mother. Of course there was Nurse Mary, too, who had scrubbed their faces and dressed the children, while they were still little, and who now fussed over their clothes and tried to look after them when Mother was too busy.

Once upon a time there had been Papa, too, but it was so long ago that the children could hardly remember. Betty just had a vague recollection of a big man with a rumble voice, who always had candy in his pocket, and who felt scratchy when he kissed her. John could remember going to the Zoo with Papa once, and playing hobby horse on his foot, but his remembrance did not go much farther.

John was almost twelve now, and Betty nearly

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ten. They both felt very big and important, and for several years they had been studying lessons every morning with Mother. Mother did not believe in sending small children to school. She thought it tended to destroy something she called their "individuality." Betty was not quite clear as to what that word meant, and even John was vague, but the little girl was sure that she must possess it. She was firm on the subject of having everything mentioned, even measles.

But now the pleasant, busy life in the city was coming to an end. They were going to live in a little house down in the country, which Mother said belonged to them, but which they had never seen. Their old nurse, and Bridget in the kitchen, all the familiar faces and things, were to be left behind. Only Mother, John and Betty were to join in this great adventure, which seemed to the children a delightful change. They were greatly excited about it, and tireless in running up and down, superintending the packing. Their tongues were even busier than their feet; Betty, particularly, was full of questions about the new home.

"Will there be trees to climb?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," replied Mother, as she carefully laid away one of the little girl's white afternoon frocks in the tray of the big trunk. "There is an orchard back of the house."

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Betty, her eyes shining like bits of smiling blue sky, turned to her brother John, who sat beside her on the lid of a trunk stuffed so full that it refused to shut even under their chubby weight. "I think it's perfectly lovely to be poor—with an orchard," she announced.

And then a dreadful thing happened. Mother began to cry. She bent over the trunk and the tears dropped down on the white dress she had just put away so carefully. The children watched a moment with round eyes. They would not have been a bit surprised if a trumpet had blown announcing the end of the world. Nothing could be more surprising than Mother, their strong refuge in all times of trouble, actually crying. Betty slipped down from the trunk lid, and ran and put her arms around Mother. Mother stopped crying and hugged the child up close. "My little sunbeam," she said, "what would I do without you!"

Betty always remembered that. Knowing that Mother depended on her made her feel very much older than her ten years. And she tried very hard after that to really be a little sunbeam. Even when she was sad inside she would smile, and she was always trying to think of something cheerful and funny to say. And then Betty found that pretending to be happy really made her so.

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John and Betty knew that something called a bank, in which Papa had put all his money before he died, had failed. The little girl pictured a bank as something like the little fat pig that stood on the nursery shelf, in which she kept all her pennies, and even nickels and dimes, when she could keep from spending them at the candy store around the corner. But John, who was two years older, and therefore very wise, said that a bank was just a big red building made of bricks, where people kept mountains of money in big cages, so nobody could take it. He had been in one twice with Mother. Neither of the children could quite understand what happened when a bank failed; whether it fell down and buried all the money, or burned up, or just disappeared the way things in fairy stories sometimes did.

The last afternoon that their nurse took them walking, the children coaxed her to take them past the bank. As they came in sight of it, they looked fearfully to see what remained of it. But there the red brick building stood, with a policeman on the steps, and a little crowd of people on the sidewalk in front. John gasped and pointed. "Why, it's all there!" he cried.

"Oh, won't Mamma be glad!" chuckled Betty, and she ran quickly across the street, while Nurse Mary hurried after her. Betty smiled sweetly at

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the policeman, and two dimples appeared in her rosy cheeks. The big policeman grinned back. "I came for Mamma's money," Betty said. "She didn't know the bank was still here all right."

The policeman stopped smiling and looked sorry. "The money's all gone," he said.

Betty's face clouded. "Did they shake it all out?" she asked.

"Yes, they stole it, the rascals!" said a man in the crowd.

"Hush," warned Nurse Mary, as she came up. "Don't put ideas in the child's head."

It was late in the afternoon when Mother and the children arrived at their new home. Even Betty's heart sank a little, when she saw it. The house was rather a pretty little white cottage, but it needed paint, and the grass around it was high and uncared for. On both sides stretched empty fields. The city-bred child had to look across the street at the row of new little red brick houses, reassuringly full of people, before she felt quite safe. The movers had already arrived, and were carrying big armloads of furniture into the little cottage. Mother was directing them where to put it. Betty looked doubtfully at John. "Let's go find the orchard," he said.

So they ploughed through the high grass around to the back of the house. And there stood rows and

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rows of trees, more than Betty could count. There were some with little green pears, some with apples, plums and peaches, and there were two trees full of ripe cherries. The two children cried out with delight. "Let's pretend we're Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday on a desert island," suggested Betty. "And this is all there is to eat for dinner. You take that tree and I'll take this one."

"All right," agreed John. And a moment later they were scrambling up.

At last Mother called. The children climbed down obediently, for they had stuffed as many cherries as they could hold. As they started toward the house, Betty looked at John, and her eyes and mouth rounded into O's of horror, for John had on a sailor suit which had once been spotlessly white, but now it was all cherry stains down the front and tree stains in back. Then she looked at her own pale blue dress; it was almost as bad. The two children stood still and thought anxiously. "Those were dreadful dirty trees," said Betty, in a disapproving tone. "I don't expect they'd ever been washed."

John nodded sadly. "I don't think we'll get any supper, if we go in like this," he said.

Betty swallowed. "I haven't got much room, anyway," she replied, cheerfully. Then an idea struck her. She examined her frock. "It's mostly

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dirty on the outside," she announced. "Let's turn them inside out."

It was no sooner said than done. And in a few minutes the children entered the house outwardly fairly clean. Supper was already on the table, and they pulled up chairs and sat down. But Mother looked at them oddly. "What ever is the matter with your clothes?" she asked. "They look too funny." She examined John's suit. "Why, it's on wrong side out!"

John gulped a piece of potato and blushed. "We—we thought they looked nicer that way," he stammered.

Mother unbuttoned his blouse and turned it, and then she understood. The two children looked guilty, but Mother was not cross. Her lips quivered a minute, and then she sat down and laughed until the tears came. John and Betty laughed, too.

The next morning John and Betty began by trying to see how many trees they could climb before lunch time. Mother had dressed them in old dark clothes that they could not hurt much, so there was nothing to prevent them from having a glorious time. They went up the cherry trees first and stayed there so long, that they did not feel like exercising much afterward. So they climbed up in the big maple tree by the front gate, and began

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watching the little red houses across the street. Everybody seemed to be washing, and there were pairs and pairs of little stockings on the line. "My, what a lot of children!" sighed Betty. "I wonder if they would play with us."

John shook his head. "Mother said we mustn't play with them because they're not nice."

Betty looked rebellious for a minute, and then she became thoughtful. "Well," she said at last, "they'll have to be savages, then." And she smiled again as if that settled the problem.

Just then a troop of boys came up the street on their way home to lunch from school. The boys spied the strange children. They halted at the gate and looked up. One youngster of ten made an ugly face. "Fatty!" he called up, teasingly.

Now Betty was very sensitive about her dimples. In every other respect she considered herself a regular boy, and she could not see why an otherwise kindly Providence should have tormented her by giving her such unmanly possessions. Plump, Betty sadly admitted that she was, always adding that every bit of it was muscle. But fat she was not, and would not permit herself to be so called.

The boy repeated the taunt. "Fatty Felix!" he called.

Betty's eyes sparkled with anger. She scrambled down out of the tree and approached the gate,

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while the less warlike John followed more slowly. "I am not," said Betty firmly. "You're a fib."

"I am not, and you are so."

The little girl pulled the gate open, righteous wrath shining in her eyes. "You call me names again and I'll slap you," she said.

The boy stood silent, a little surprised at finding resistance in a girl. But his companions began to laugh at him, and call him "scare cat." After all the little girl was smaller than he. He came a step or two inside the gate. "Fatty," he said, not very loud.

Betty was about to strike, but then she remembered. It was "no fair" fighting unless one was hit first. She doubled up her fists and shut her teeth hard. "You just touch me once, and I'll knock you down," she said.

The boy was not much afraid. Nothing had come of the first threat. He reached out and touched Betty gingerly on the arm. The next instant a firm fist with forty pounds of muscle behind it landed on his pug nose. The boy dropped to the sidewalk, clutching his injured nose and howling. Betty glared at the other boys, and they drew back respectfully. Presently the injured youth rose. There was not a bit of fight left in him. Blood streamed down his face, mingling with his tears, as he went out the gate and turned toward

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home. John gave his sister a look of deep admiration. "Do you s'pose he's hurt much?" he asked.

Betty looked anxious for just a moment. Then she shook her head. "Oh, no; I just made his nose bleed. Served him right," coldly.

Betty felt that she had done perfectly right, but still when she saw the boy, his nose now washed and bloodless, but still crying a little, coming down the street beside a large fat woman, she retired in haste to the orchard back of the house; she felt it was wiser to do so.

The fat woman came in, marched up on the porch and rang the bell. Curiosity made Betty come back from the orchard and peep around the side of the house. Mother opened the door and regarded her visitors with surprise. The woman spoke in a very loud voice. "Yer bye bloodied my bye's nose," she announced.

Mother looked shocked. "John!" she called. John came in from the garden. "John," sternly, "did you hit this little boy?"

John hesitated; he was not a tattle-tale. But just then Betty bounced around the side of the house. She would take her own punishment; John should not be falsely accused. "John didn't," she said all in one breath. "I punched him just once on the nose, because he called me Fatty Felix and hit me on the arm."

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Mother looked astonished, as she stared at her warlike daughter. "Why, Betty!" she gasped.

But the mother of the victim appeared even more surprised. "Well, I niver!" Turning to her son, "Ye spalpeen! Howlin' because a bit of a gurl hit ye. Git along home with ye!"

Mother talked very seriously to Betty about how little girls ought to be gentle and kind and never rough. Usually Betty was very sorry when she was scolded, but this time she felt she had been right. "Boys fight when they're hit," she protested, "and girls are just as good as boys."

Mother sighed and gave it up. Perhaps, too, it would be wrong to break the child's independent spirit. But she warned Betty that she must not fight again.

CHAPTER II

SUNDAY SCHOOL

“WHAT beautiful curls!” said a soft voice.

John and Betty were playing just outside the garden fence that Saturday morning. They were trying to see which could get back and forth over the fence the quickest. Betty looked up when she heard the voice, and she thought she had never before seen such a funny little old lady. Above her gray hair perched a little black hat with two long quills in front. She was very fat, and wore large goggle spectacles over her eyes. Betty thought she looked just like a big good-natured lady beetle.

Betty smiled because she always counted everyone as a friend, unless she was playing one of her pretend games. Then people she met might be anything from Captain Kidd to a Bengal tiger. The beetle lady smiled, too, and gently patted one of the little girl's soft flaxen curls. “What is your name, dear?” she asked.

“Betty Stamford, and,” sociably, “this is my brother, John Louis Stamford. What's yours?”

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"I'm Mrs. Patterson. I teach Sunday School. I don't remember seeing you there."

"What do you do in Sunday School?" asked Betty, for though she had been to church so often that her short legs felt stiff and weary at the very thought of the high hard seats, Mother had always taught the children at home.

"You learn all about the Bible," replied the teacher, "and when you know your lesson well, you get pretty pictures. Then we all go on a picnic in the summer, and there's a big entertainment at Christmas."

The word picnic caught the children's attention. Their eyes sparkled.

"Would you like to come?" asked Mrs. Patterson.

"Oh, yes!" they chorused.

And just then Mother came to the door. The beetle lady saw her, and went in to ask if the children might go. Mother felt sorry to give up the quiet readings from the Bible on Sunday afternoons, when she had taught the children the most interesting stories in that wonderful Book. But John and Betty looked very eager, so she said yes.

The next morning at a quarter of ten, John and Betty, dressed in their Sunday best, set off down the street hand in hand. It was half a mile to the gray stone church in the town, and they felt very

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grown up going all by themselves. Just inside the church door they found Mrs. Patterson. She put John in a boy's class on one side of the Sunday School room, and taking Betty to the other side, placed her in a class with a lot of little girls. Betty did not like that. She stood up very straight and said, "I want to be with John; I'm not a sissy."

The little girls all rolled their eyes and looked dreadfully shocked. Mrs. Patterson took a pretty picture card out of the book she was carrying. "You can have that, Betty," she said, "if you are good."

Betty looked at the card. It showed angels and lambs and doves. She took it and sat down, and Mrs. Patterson heaved a sigh of relief.

"Let me see," whispered the little girl beside Betty. Betty was not a selfish child, so the card went the length of the class. There was a man up in front talking, but the little girl could not hear much of what he said. She soon lost interest, and started an entertaining topic herself. "When I get to Heaven, I'm going to have horses and dogs, and calves and goats, and cats and guinea pigs ——"

"S-s-sh!" said the teacher.

"They don't have animals in Heaven," whispered the other little girl.

"They do so. Look at the picture!" and she

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presented the card as absolute proof. "Only," she added, "I hope they don't have mosquitoes," and she rubbed an itchy place.

"S-s-s-sh!" said the teacher.

At last the man finished talking, and Miss Smith turned around to her class. Betty watched her curiously. She was younger, but almost as funny looking as Mrs. Patterson. The little girl wondered if all Sunday School teachers looked queer. But no. There was a pretty one right across the aisle.

"The lesson for to-day," said Miss Smith, "is the crossing of the Jews into Canaan."

"I like Daniel better," suggested Betty.

"Why?" asked Miss Smith, humoring her.

"Because there's lions in it."

"I don't like lions," said the smallest tot in the class.

Betty regarded her with disdain. "A lion would eat you all up in one gobble," she said.

The little girl whimpered, and the teacher came to the rescue. "There aren't any lions here, Gladys," she said, "so don't cry."

"Unless they escaped from the zoo," added Betty darkly. "Sometimes they do, you know."

The timid child wept aloud. "I want my mamma!"

Miss Smith soothed her, and then turned to

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Betty with a frown. "You mustn't speak again until the end of the class," she warned.

Betty sat silent and restless, while the Jews traveled slowly into Canaan. But at last she found something to distract her attention. Miss Smith smiled and something gleamed in her mouth. What was it? Betty watched, but the teacher did not smile again right away. So Betty tried to make her. She curled up the corners of her mouth and showed all her dimples in a most engaging smile. Miss Smith fairly melted. Perhaps she had been too severe with the dear child. So she smiled back.

Betty thrilled. Yes, it was—at least she thought it was—a gold tooth right in front. To make sure the "dear child" smiled again. Miss Smith once more responded; it appeared to her a good time to coax an apology from the child for her naughtiness. "Why are you smiling, dear?" she asked.

Betty appeared embarrassed, but she had been trained to be truthful at all costs. "I wanted to make you smile," she replied.

The teacher was flattered; a compliment was rather rare. "Why did you want me to smile?" she asked, beaming.

The child wriggled. Then, "I wanted to see if it is really gold."

Instantly all the children's eyes were riveted on

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the teacher's mouth. Fortunately at that moment the bell rang dismissing Sunday School, and Miss Smith escaped.

The Reverend Mr. Wayland, a youthful minister, made a habit of meeting the pupils at the door, speaking to and shaking hands with each one of them as they went out. Mr. Wayland was a handsome, clean-cut young man, and he had not given up his athletics through his love of books and learning. He had become a minister not to make a living, but because he loved to help people, and thought that the best way.

Just outside the door several parents were waiting to take their children home. Among them Mr. Wayland noticed a stranger: a charming young woman with curly black hair, brilliant dark eyes, and the sweetest mouth in the world. Mrs. Patterson stood near by. "Who is she?" asked Mr. Wayland.

"That's Mrs. Stamford, the mother of the dark-haired boy and the little girl with flaxen curls."

"Is it possible!" regarding John and Betty. "She looks like a girl."

"Married young, I expect," said Mrs. Patterson, as she greeted another child.

Betty smiled engagingly at the minister, as she did at everyone. Mr. Wayland felt an impulse to

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detain the child. "How do you like Sunday School?" he asked.

"It's all right," she replied without enthusiasm, "but I don't like being in a class with little girls; they're afraid of lions."

The minister's eyes twinkled. "Aren't you afraid of lions?"

Betty rubbed her toe against the step. "Y-yes. But I wouldn't *cry* even if one was coming after me," firmly.

"Wouldn't you?" interrupted a small boy, who stood beside the minister. There was a note of admiration in his voice.

The little girl looked at him critically. He had red hair and freckles, but was otherwise quite presentable. "No, I wouldn't," she replied. "Would you?"

He nodded, and the minister laughed, and put his arm around the boy. "Bobby is no coward," he said, "or he wouldn't admit it."

Betty had an uncomfortable feeling for a moment that there might be a personal application to that remark. But Mother was approaching, and there was another question she wanted to ask before starting home. "Is Bobby your little boy?" she inquired.

The young minister flushed. "No, he's my brother."

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“Oh.” Turning to Bobby, “Then haven’t you any father either?”

Mr. Wayland’s heart gave a thump of joy. So she was a widow. Bobby shook his head. Just then a charming voice interrupted. “I must start my children home,” she said. “They will take up your whole morning if you let them.”

“Mrs. Stamford, I believe?” asked the minister, and they shook hands. As the church bell sounded, “Do you mind if Bobby goes with them? It will help to keep him out of mischief until after service.”

Mrs. Stamford had her doubts of any advantages that might be derived by Bobby from her children, but she assented readily enough.

Neither John nor Betty was a bad child. They never meant to be naughty—at least hardly ever. If Mother told them not to do a thing, she could be pretty sure they would not do it. The difficulty was to imagine the things the children might do, enough ahead of time to forbid them.

The three children walked in the grass on the side of the road so as not to get their good shoes dusty. Bobby was evidently a victim of shyness, for he kept his gaze fastened on the toes of his shoes. Apparently he did not possess the disposition that generally goes with red hair and freckles.

“How old are you?” asked John.

JOHN AND BETTY

"Ten, going on eleven."

"I'm eleven, going on twelve," proudly.

"Bobby's just a baby," said Betty, loftily.

"Why, you're not ten yourself."

Betty tossed her curls. "I guess I'm just as old as you are."

"You are not."

"Am so."

"Are not."

Betty changed the conversation. "Oh, see that rabbit run across the road." The boys looked eagerly. "Wouldn't it be nice to go down to the woods?"

"Let's."

"All right."

Betty was in the habit of sharing everything with her brother, even his age, so that she really looked down upon Bobby as younger than herself. There was only one concession that she made to John. He might be leader in every game, if only she were his lieutenant, and he did exactly as she told him.

CHAPTER III

CAPTAIN KIDD

It was only a short distance across the fields from Mrs. Stamford's house to the woods. The children did not enter by any of the paths that grown folk used. They climbed a low rail fence, and then followed an old cow track across a bit of marshy land. This ended at the edge of a muddy little stream. The children crossed on a narrow plank. The ground on the other side was very soft, so they jumped from grassy hillock to hillock to keep from getting muddy. Of course they slipped a few times, and probably got quite as much mud on their shoes as if they had not jumped along so carefully. Presently the ground became firmer. They pushed their way through a bank of high bushes, and came out on a little clearing beside a shallow stream. The clearing was surrounded by trees and thick bushes. Probably no one had ever found the way there before except the children and the little wild creatures.

The clearing was carpeted with what the children called "fairy" grass, because it was soft, sweet and emerald green like the finest lawn. On the

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other side of the stream wild lady-slippers, honey-suckle, and cardinal flowers were in bloom, and hundreds of butterflies flashed in and out among the gorgeous blossoms. Dragon flies with their filmy wings and jewel eyes darted over the clear ripples. The children paused a moment to watch. "The butterflies are fairies," Betty explained, "and the dragon flies are goblins. At night they come here to dance. The queen and king sit in the fairy ring, and all their court dance around them. See, here it is." And she pointed to one of those faint rings marked in the soft grass that one finds in distant parts of the woods. Bobby stared at it with round eyes.

"Let's have a swing," proposed the practical John.

The children had found on the edge of the clearing a half fallen pine tree, that rested on the branches of a slender sapling. By climbing clear to the top of the pine tree, they could bend it down to the ground, but the sapling was so elastic, that when they sat astride the tree trunk and pushed against the ground with their feet, the top of the tree would spring nearly twenty feet into the air before coming down again. It made a wonderful seesaw. John and Betty had not told Mother about it, however, for they did not want her to feel anxious about them. Also they feared she might

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forbid them to use the swing. Of course the old pine might break some time, but there were plenty of branches of young trees, that they might catch and swing down by. They had done it many times just for fun.

When the children had been swinging for about ten minutes, Betty had an idea. The morning was hot and the water looked invitingly cool. "Let's play pirates," she suggested. "John can be Captain Kidd, and I'll be his lieutenant, and Bobby can be an English admiral, who gets captured."

As the tree came down to the ground again, the children swung their feet over to the same side, and all jumped off together, whereupon the pine rose in the air. In a moment they had stripped off shoes and stockings and were paddling in the cool water. Captain Kidd and his able lieutenant constructed a pirate fleet from strips of bark, using twigs as masts, and large leaves as sails. The English admiral imitated them.

The two fleets were lined up on opposite sides of the stream, and then were blown across to meet each other. The wind was supplied by the leaders' mouths. After an exciting battle the admiral was captured. The children paused quite breathless and happy. Then John said, "Now we'll have to lock you in the ship's hold and keep you for ransom."

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“All right,” Bobby agreed. “Where’s the hold?”

The children looked doubtful. Then Betty said, “Let’s use the old boat on the duck pond. That has a real door that locks.”

They hung their shoes and stockings about their necks, and waded down-stream to a cleared space on the opposite side. Here they climbed out upon a narrow path leading through the woods. Suddenly Bobby screamed. “What’s the matter?” demanded John.

“Oh, run quick! There’s a snake!”

John looked, and saw a big water snake lying coiled up beside a rock a few feet away. Its skin was covered with diamond shaped patches of coppery red and yellow, and it was running its wicked looking tongue in and out. John felt a little nervous when he saw it, but he would not show that he was frightened. “What’s a snake!” he said, and picked up a stout stick.

Just then Betty saw something more. A little bird was hopping about in the grass in front of the snake. It fluttered its wings, but it seemed unable to fly away from those glittering eyes that held it. “It’s charming the little bird, the horrid thing!” cried Betty. And forgetting all about being afraid, she snatched up a heavy stone, ran across the path and threw it with all her might.

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The snake writhed in pain, and turned away from the bird. He wriggled toward the little girl, but John had followed, and with a few hard blows of his club he finished that snake's bird-killing days. Meantime the little bird hopped feebly for a few feet, as if astonished that it was not seized and eaten. Then suddenly it spread its wings and found it could fly. It fluttered up into a big tree over the path, and in a few moments the children heard him begin to whistle his great thankfulness to be alive. They listened. "Oh, isn't he glad!" said Betty, smiling.

As the children went on through the woods, Bobby felt very much ashamed, because he had been so afraid of the snake, when the others were so brave. He made up his mind he would never be afraid of anything again; at least he would not show it.

In a short time the children came out on the edge of a pond. It was called the duck pond, because the wild geese and ducks stopped there to feed on their way north and south. Hardly anyone ever went there, except a few hunters, so that the children felt as if they quite owned it.

They loved to come down early in the morning before even the farmers were up. Before five o'clock all the misty world seemed their own. Diamond drops of dew still lay among the grasses,

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and across the dim, gray lake sounded the wild notes of the mourning doves. The cries had worried Betty, until at last she saw one of the little gray birds in the woods. It looked so very harmless and cheerful, that the little girl decided the dove did not really mean all it said.

At five o'clock the catfish were still holding social gatherings on the surface of the water, and discussing the latest news in low bubbling tones. Betty did not like catfish. At first she would not keep those she caught. Their black color, tentacles and slate blue eyes gave them too terrible an aspect. Ordinary fish did not look at one, but a catfish would stare anybody out of countenance. Betty always felt that their glare was wickedly disapproving.

The children always enjoyed the frog chorus, from the drumlike brrrum, brrrum, brrrum, of the old basso, to the high squeak of the youngsters. The sound seemed cheerful and companionable.

With the first ray of sunlight, the children would throw out their lines. In a moment the fishes were up, wakened by the light, and looking for breakfast. Juicy worms never failed to appeal to them, and soon the young fishermen had captured all they needed for breakfast. Yellow Neds and sunfish were the favorites, for they were tender and

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sweet. Black bass and pickerel had to be thrown back, unless they were a foot long or over.

On the near side of the pond an old launch was drawn up on the sandy bank. It was the children's dearest possession, though it was part full of water and nearly covered with water spiders. John and Betty climbed aboard, and Bobby, after a moment's hesitation, followed, ashamed 'to seem afraid.

The windows to the cabin of the boat had been boarded up, and the door was fastened with a bolt. John pulled back the bolt with some difficulty, and opened the door. "There! Doesn't that make a fine prison?" he asked with pride.

The floor of the cabin was raised a little higher than the deck, so that it was comparatively dry. Still Bobby did not feel very enthusiastic as he entered. Betty picked up a small water turtle that was trying to climb aboard. "Here," she said, offering it, "prisoners always have pets, you know. It will have to do instead of a rat."

Bobby accepted the creature reluctantly. He and the turtle seemed to regard each other with mutual suspicion. "There are plenty of spiders," said John, looking around with satisfaction. "You always have to have spiders, and these save us having to catch some for you."

The idea of pets for the prisoner became very

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attractive to his captors, and they searched about diligently for small animals with which he could pass the long hours of solitude. John thought a tame snake would be appropriate, but since their experience had been with a very nasty tempered one, they were inclined to be shy of reptiles.

“Why couldn’t he be like the ‘Man in the Iron Mask’?” suggested Betty.

“Well,” said John, “we haven’t any iron here, and the only thing we have at home is that mask I used last Hallowe’en.”

“That won’t do,” she objected. “We can’t spend all that time going home. Let’s make one.”

“How?” discouragingly.

“Not out of iron, of course. But we left some brown paper in the locker, and my box of paints is there, too. I was going to make some pictures to hang up.”

Betty took the paper and paint out of the locker, and John cut a piece the right size for Bobby’s face. With his pocket knife, he also made openings for eyes, nose and mouth. Then Betty colored the mask black, since all the iron she had seen was that shade. But with true artistic feeling, she finished off the holes for eyes, mouth and nose with scarlet rings. The water colors dried quickly, and then John tied the mask upon the

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prisoner with a piece of string. Bobby's cap was turned inside out, and put on backward.

"Doesn't he look awful?" said Betty delightedly.

But John was busy recalling all the stories of prisoners that he knew. Since they had already taken so much trouble, they might as well make it a perfect piece of work. "Prisoners are always sending out messages for help," he declared. "You'll have to tear off pieces of the paper that's left, and write on 'em, 'I am the true king falsely imprisoned by my wicked uncle,' 'Rescue me,' and all that sort of thing. Here's a pencil," and he held forth a very stubby specimen.

"Generally, they scratch it on the bottom of their dinner plates, and throw 'em out the window," objected his sister.

"Well, we haven't any plates, so he'll have to use the paper," decided John. "He can throw it out the window just the same. And, Bobby," stooping to pick up a rusty nail, "you'll have to write the story of your wrongs on the stones of your cell. They all do."

The prisoner accepted the nail reluctantly, and tried it on a plank. The result was not at all legible. "I guess it would take a year to write with that," he declared.

"You might be shut up for twenty years, you

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know, if you weren't ransomed," replied his captor cheerfully.

"But not really," anxiously. "I've got to get home for supper."

John fell from the realms of imagination. "Well," he conceded, "you can use the pencil, and make believe it's a nail."

"All right," agreed Bobby, but his expression behind the mask indicated that the life of a prisoner did not impress him as one of unalloyed joy.

"Now we'll go collect your ransom," said Betty.

"Please don't be long," requested Bobby anxiously, as the door was closed and bolted.

"All right," said John.

The children meant to be gone about five minutes, but they saw a rabbit, and followed it to discover where it was going, Betty having high hopes that there might be baby bunnies. However, they lost it at the edge of a field. Here they sat on the fence to put on their shoes and stockings. Betty had hardly fastened the last buckle, when she spied a big yellow cat in the field. Now Betty had always longed to own a yellow cat, and she hardly thought this one could belong to anybody, when it was way out in the fields like this. So she started in pursuit, and John with her.

The cat was scary and led them a long chase. At last they lost it in the field just back of their own

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orchard. They paused, hot and weary. Then they heard their mother calling: "John! Betty! Come to dinner!"

The children suddenly realized that they were completely starved. With a bound they were over the fence and running through the orchard.

"What ever were you children doing?" asked Mother.

"We were chasing a cat," said John.

"It was yellow," added Betty.

In the meantime, Bobby made advances toward the turtle, but it had no appreciation of the duties of a prisoner's pet. Instead of sitting on his knee and nibbling his finger in the approved fashion, it crawled under the locker and hid. When Bobby hauled the turtle forth again, it drew in its head, legs and tiny tail as if terrified. The little boy thought that perhaps it was the mask which had so upset the small creature, but since the mask was iron, he could not well remove it without upsetting all the make-believes.

Bobby next tried his hand at writing. Several piteous pleas were thrown out the small port-hole window on imaginary plates. But each was caught by the pitiless waves, and went dancing out on the water, to surprise the spiders and bugs, some of which climbed aboard and took a ride. The prisoner now hunted about his cell. In a corner he

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found two or three small pebbles. He wrote another message, wrapped it about a pebble, stretched his arm as far out the window as he could, and threw the small missive toward shore. It landed on the sand.

When the stones were exhausted, the prisoner set himself to make the wall inscription. John and Betty should be back any minute now, and he did not wish to incur the criticism of his jailers through not having done the proper things. On a fairly smooth plank, Bobby drew a lopsided skull and cross bones. Beneath it he wrote, "I am the trew son of Loois XIIIth, and the Dawfin of france."

For a moment he admired his effort. Then he set himself to ornamenting the capitals. This finally accomplished, Bobby began to feel hungry. His jailers had been gone a long time. He looked out of the port-hole, but could see nothing of them. The ransom must have been difficult to collect.

For a while the prisoner amused himself by watching the fish, that occasionally broke the surface of the water, and the glittering dragon flies, which darted back and forth. A minnow rose and tasted one of the imaginary plates that had been thrown over. It did not like the flavor, and promptly swam away in search of other food. A big snapping turtle, a forty-pounder, swam lazily

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alongside, and seemed to fall asleep with its nose just out of water. Bobby dropped a bit of wood beside it. Instantly the turtle dived, and vanished in a swirl of water. The boy laughed.

Then the boy noticed that it was getting really late. The long afternoon had passed. Even supper time was gone, and the red sun was just sinking beyond the hills. Already the shadows were lengthening in the woods, while the sunset still gleamed red on the lake. The breeze that comes with evening was ruffling the surface of the water into jeweled wavelets. Anxiously Bobby stared up the darkening path among the trees. No one was in sight. Had his jailers forgotten him, or had some dreadful accident befallen them? They might have drowned in the lake, sunk in a bog, been kidnapped by gypsies or a tramp.

The little boy shivered. A chill mist was rising from the water. Paramount in his mind was the feeling that he must escape, and find out what had become of his playmates. First he tried the window, but it was too small to permit his shoulders to pass through. The casing was strong, and he could not tear it away to make a larger opening. Bobby pushed against the door, then kicked it furiously, but the bolt held firm. The harder the prisoner tried to escape, the more frightened he became. Frightful imaginings rose up in his mind.

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Suppose the boat should fill with water, and sink, when he could not get out. He had not noticed how close the bank was beneath it, and it was too dark to see now. Frantically, he flung himself against the door. It shook but did not give.

Then Bobby rushed to the window, and screamed. At first his voice quavered, and would not carry, but presently it deepened into a sturdy shout. "Help, help, help!" he cried. "Help, help, help!" the hills answered back, but there was no human reply.

The boy tried again and again. At last, as he was resting to get back his breath, a cheerful whistle, accompanied by the rustle of bare feet, sounded on the woodland path. A farmer boy was coming down catfishing. Bobby gave a gasp of relief, and rushed to the window. He would be free at last. The prisoner thrust his head through the window, and turned it toward shore. "Help!" he shouted.

There was just enough twilight left, so that the farmer's boy could see the apparition: a terrible, featureless, black face, with red rings for eyes, nose and mouth. With a breathless "Jiminy crickets!" the boy had dropped his bait can and fled, his fishing forgotten. Too late Bobby remembered the mask, and jerked it off. The woods were bare of all human life but his own. No reply came

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back to his shouts but the distant hoot of a questing owl, the chorus of the frogs, and the soft lap, lap of the water against the boat. No one came to investigate the strange thing that the farmer's boy had seen, for he did not tell of it. He did not want to be laughed at. In his own mind he was convinced that he had seen the ghost of Jimmy Duncan, who had been drowned in the pond two years before.

After John and Betty had had their dinner, Mother redressed the children, and took them to the city to see their Aunt Bessie. They had a lovely time. Aunt Bessie had a wonderful attic full of quaint old toys. There were real wax dolls, that one mustn't hug too hard, because they got soft, little horses and carriages, puzzles and games of all kinds, and best of all a hobby horse as large as a real pony, that jumped and bucked on springs like a western broncho, when one rode him. John and Betty were so happy and busy that they did not think once of poor Bobby waiting for them to come back.

Aunt Bessie made them stay for supper, and they had cake and ice-cream for dessert; all they could eat of it.

It was after dark when they finally got home. They found Mr. Wayland sitting on the front porch. Mother looked very much surprised to see

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him there. He rose and took off his hat. His face looked very anxious. "I can't find Bobby," he said; "he's been gone all day. And I thought perhaps John and Betty might have some idea where he could be."

The children suddenly remembered. "Oh, poor Bobby!" cried Betty.

"He isn't—hurt?" asked Mr. Wayland.

"Oh, no. You see John was Captain Kidd and I was his lieutenant. And we captured the English admiral, and shut him up while we got the ransom."

"Pirates do," interrupted John.

"And then we forgot all about him. Oh, let's hurry and let him out. He must be dreadfully frightened."

A few minutes later the whole party, Mr. Wayland and John in the lead with an oil lantern that Mother supplied from the house, were hurrying across the fields. John took them the long way round to the pond, because he did not think that Mother would be very good at wading in her long skirts. Mother shuddered when she saw the old boat. "Poor child!" she murmured.

Mr. Wayland jerked back the bolt and flung open the door. A forlorn little figure rushed into his arms. "Oh, Pete!" cried Bobby.

The minister hugged him up close, but presently

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Bobby raised his head and looked around. He saw John and Betty standing on the bank looking very sorry. He smiled. "I wasn't scared," said Bobby, but with a little quiver in his voice. "I didn't cry—hardly at all."

"I think you're awfully brave," said Betty. "I'd have cried—buckets."

CHAPTER IV

THE FAIRIES

THE children had sought the coolness of the woods that hot July afternoon. They sat on the green bank dabbling their bare feet in the water. John and Betty looked aggrieved, and Bobby's expression was in sympathy with theirs. "It's really too bad!" Betty finally burst out. "I don't see why Uncle John had to forget our birthdays just when we needed the money more than we ever did before."

John and Betty had both been born on the third of July. As Betty used to explain it, they were twins, only two years apart. Uncle John had always been in the habit of sending them each a dollar bill on their birthday, but this year he was taking a very delightful vacation up in the mountains, and had forgotten all about it. The children had been counting on the money for firecrackers, as Mother could not afford to buy them things this year, and they were deeply disappointed when the expected letter did not arrive. Mother had given them each ten cents, before she went in to the office

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in the city, where she was busy every day now earning money to buy food for two hungry young mouths. But twenty cents would provide a Fourth of July celebration not at all in keeping with the children's ideas of patriotism.

"Uncle John might have remembered this once!" Betty complained.

John grunted. He was of a philosophical nature that takes life as it comes, good or bad.

"You can help me shoot off my firecrackers," Bobby offered generously.

Betty's face brightened a moment and then darkened again. "It isn't the same thing," she said gloomily. Her glance traveled sadly over the sunny little glade. She no longer heard the cheerful whistling of the birds, or noticed the gay butterflies. Mechanically her eyes rested on the fairy circle in the grass. Suddenly she started, and her eyes brightened. "Let's ask the fairies," she said. "You know, if you stand in the middle of a fairy ring and wish, it always comes true. But you have to wish very hard."

"Do you suppose it would really work?" asked John doubtfully.

"Well, we could try it, and see."

"Yes," he admitted, "I suppose we could."

Bobby had listened anxiously. To his church-bred mind, asking the fairies seemed very much like

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some sort of heathen rite. "Wouldn't it be better to pray for it?" he asked.

John shook his head. "No, I've tried that, and it didn't work. I prayed for three weeks for a new fishing-rod, and didn't even get the string."

"Mamma says we ought only to pray for things we really need, and then we would get them," said Betty.

John frowned judicially. "Well, I guess we don't really need firecrackers. We just want them. So we'd better ask the fairies."

John and Betty stood in the middle of the fairy ring, and wished and wished just as hard as ever they could for nearly five minutes. As they stepped out again, being careful not to step on the edge, John said, "I guess there couldn't anybody have wished harder than I did." He spoke in a tone of satisfaction.

"I wished just as hard," replied Betty.

They sat down on the bank again quite cheerfully, and began planning what they would buy, just as if it was all settled. But presently Betty grew restless. "Let's explore," she suggested. "We've never been to the top of the stream. There might be all kinds of things there."

John sat still. "I'm too hot," he said. "But you can go by yourself, and then tell us about it."

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The little girl hesitated a moment. Exploring alone was not quite so much fun.

"I'll go along, if you want me to," offered Bobby, but without enthusiasm.

"Oh, no, you needn't," replied Betty, beginning to tie her shoes around her neck with her stockings. "And you needn't wait for me to come back. Maybe it goes miles and miles." Turning to John, "And you look after Bobby, and see he doesn't get into trouble."

Bobby wriggled uncomfortably. "I wish you wouldn't always fuss over me so," he complained.

"Well, we promised Mr. Wayland we'd always take good care of you," John explained, "so we have to." Then to his sister, "And you'd better be careful and not get hurt. I don't know if you ought to go by yourself."

Betty tossed her curls independently. "I'm a whole year older now," she said. "I'll be all right," and she started wading up-stream.

In places the water rose over the little girl's knees, and she had to be careful not to step into even deeper holes. She walked as fast as she could, splashing a lot to keep herself company, until she came to a part of the stream where she had never been before. Then she moved softly, watching for any of the little wild creatures that

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she might surprise. The brook had grown narrower and rather shallow now, and its bed was soft and muddy. Betty thought it felt rather like walking through a pan of dough.

Presently, as the little girl scrambled over a fallen log, and turned a corner in the stream, she came upon one of the most beautiful things she had ever seen. Straight ahead the brook divided and ran on either side of a small island. The island was just covered with wild roses in full bloom. Betty thought it looked like a huge pink bouquet, that some giant had dropped into the water. Then she caught a flash of flying gold, and an oriole vanished among the rose-bushes. The little girl stole up softly, and peered through the branches. There in the sun-dappled shade was a nest. The mother oriole was perched on the very edge, and three babies were crying for their dinner. Betty stood so still that she looked just like a tree stump to the little bird. Mother Oriole perked her golden head first on one side and then on the other. Then she leaned forward, and poked the delicious bug she had brought down the nearest baby's neck. The other two babies shrieked aloud, because they did not get any. The baby who was fed gulped down the bug, then he opened his mouth as wide as ever, and shrieked too.

With a flutter of brilliant wings the mother was

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gone, but in a moment she had returned with another bug, and the whole performance was repeated with another baby. Betty watched the little bird bring nearly a dozen worms and insects to her ravenous children, and when she had finished they still cried as if they had not had a single bite. Mother Oriole sat down on the edge of the nest to get back her breath, and Betty thought she looked at her babies as if she wondered where ever they put all that good food.

"If I had babies like that," Betty told her, "I'd make them work and help get their dinner."

Mother Oriole started so she nearly fell off the nest. She turned her head, and her bright dark eye looked straight at Betty. "Merciful heavens! A human monster come to eat her helpless children!" She trembled with fear, but she spread out her wings and fluffed up her feathers to make herself look bigger, and she twittered scoldingly.

Betty understood. "I wouldn't hurt your babies for the world," she said softly. "Good-bye, Mrs. Oriole." And she waded gently away. A little way up the stream, she heard Mother Oriole begin to sing joyfully, as she set out once more to hunt for food for her miraculously saved children.

Betty saw many strange birds now, as she moved deeper into the marsh-land. A long-legged crane

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flapped lazily overhead. There were gray turtle-doves with their mournful call, and funny little speckled birds with pearl gray vests, on the banks, who looked as if they were always dancing to some imaginary hurdy-gurdy, as they bobbed and curtsied. Then there were kingfishers, diving into the water to bring up a wriggling minnow, and wood-thrushes with their sweet, shy song, and now and then a scarlet cardinal making a splash of brilliant color against the green of the woods.

And all about were thousands of gorgeous butterflies, from the great gold, purple and black fellows, sunning themselves in lazy vanity, to the dainty pale yellow ones, fluttering by hundreds from flower to flower. The little girl stopped to watch them. She thought they looked like thousands of flowers themselves, freed from stalks and leaves.

Presently Betty started to move on, and she found that her feet had sunk in the mud up to the ankle. She could hardly pull them out, and they sank again at once, wherever she set them. She was naturally a brave child, but she looked about anxiously now. All about her stretched marsh-land, and the child, who had felt so well accompanied by the birds and butterflies, was suddenly lonely. The stream had become a mere shallow trickle through the mud, which extended every-

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where. But no, there to the left was a narrow tongue of land with larger bushes on it, and it looked fairly solid. In terror of the mud, which was slowly creeping above her ankles, Betty plunged toward the firmer ground.

A tremendous effort was required for each step, and she sank deeper at every movement. But still she struggled on. It was not possible that she should have to die in the midst of all the flowers and sunshine. She dared not stop. She was only a few feet from safety, when she found she could not take another step; the mud held her fast. Then for the first time in her life real terror came, and she began to scream.

Betty screamed and screamed, and blinding tears ran down her face, and all the time she was conscious of the awful sucking tug of the mud. It seemed ages later, when she heard a rough voice shouting, "Here, stop that row!"

Betty looked up, gasping with weariness, and saw a big boy coming out along the tongue of land. He carried a shotgun under one arm, and Betty knew him at once. He was Dan Wilson, the bad boy of the little town, who was always held up as a dreadful example to all the good boys. Dan played hooky, and did as he pleased. Betty had always secretly admired him as he swaggered past in his old clothes, though she had never ventured to

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speak to him. Ten years old has a great respect for thirteen.

Dan came out to the end of the firm ground, and tested the mud beyond, but drew back, shaking his head. Betty watched anxiously. "Lie down flat on the mud, and stretch out your hands to me," commanded the boy.

Betty obeyed without an instant's hesitation, and at the same time Dan spread himself on the mud, pointing toward her, after catching his toes firmly in the roots of a large bush. Still he could not quite reach the child. So he unbuckled his belt, and tossed her the end of it. Betty seized hold tight. "Now keep perfectly still," warned Dan. And taking a good grip with his toes, he pulled with all his might.

Very slowly and reluctantly the mud let go of Betty, and at last the boy dragged her up on the solid bank. Both children had to sit down and rest, for they were worn out with the struggle. Betty thought that Dan, mud and all, was the nicest boy she had ever seen—except, of course, John. He looked down at her and smiled. "Thank you ever so much for pulling me out," said Betty, and she kissed him frankly.

Dan blushed underneath the mud, and rose abruptly. "That's nothin'," he growled. But he did not look cross.

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When Betty had rested a little while, the children started home. They stopped at the first clear stream and washed the mud from their faces and hands; that made them feel a little more respectable. It was after sunset when they came in sight of Betty's home. They approached across the field toward the orchard at the back, for the little girl felt she was hardly sufficiently spick and span to meet company, if there should chance to be any. At the edge of the orchard Dan stopped. "Good-bye," he said. "I guess I'll go on home now."

But Betty would not hear of that. She seized his hand and pulled him firmly toward the house. "You've got to come in and be properly thanked," she insisted.

As the kitchen door swung open, Mother looked up relievedly. So Betty was home at last, just in time for supper. But the next instant, she caught sight of two pitch black figures. Mother forgot all about the chops broiling on the fire, as her small daughter dragged the reluctant and muddy hero in. "What ever has happened to you?" cried Mother.

Betty kept firm hold of Dan's sleeve, and spoke all in one breath. "I was drowning in the swamp, and I screamed and screamed, and Dan came, and he lay down on the mud, and I lay on the mud, and he pulled me out—with his feet in a bush, and I made him come in to be thanked, because I was half

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drowned, and I'd been all drowned by now, if he hadn't."

Mother gasped. Then she hugged both the children, mud and all. It was only when a great sizzling began that she remembered the chops, and saved them just in time. Mother made Dan stay to supper, and she gave him some of John's things to wear, while she cleaned the mud off his own clothes. Betty could not help giggling because Dan looked so funny with John's blouse pulled tight around him, and the sleeves climbing half-way up his long arms.

That night John and Betty left their purses on the bureau, where the fairies could not fail to see them, when they came.

CHAPTER V

THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

THE Fourth of July dawned clear and bright, and the children bounced out of bed with the first firecracker, and ran to see what the fairies had brought. There lay the purses still on the bureau, as flat and empty as they had been the night before. There was not a firecracker in sight; not even a penny lay on the floor. The children searched thoroughly.

John rose and dusted off the knees of his pajamas; he looked very much disgusted. "I guess it's not true about the fairies giving you what you wish for," he said.

His sister nodded sadly. "But maybe we really didn't wish quite hard enough."

John did not argue. "Well, anyway, we didn't get it."

There was no denying that, so Betty was silent.

John and Betty took the firecrackers they had bought with their twenty cents, and went over to Bobby Wayland's, where they set them off, one at a time to make them last longer. Then they

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helped Bobby get rid of his supply. Still, when they came home to dinner, they felt that much was lacking to the enjoyment of the day.

After dinner, Mother went in to the city to see Aunt Bessie. She did not take the children, for Aunt Bessie was not very well. John and Betty promised to be very good until Mother came back. They sat on the front steps, and Betty told stories. John enjoyed her stories very much, because he was always the hero. If John had really done all the things Betty let him do in her stories, he would have been a young Samson and Jack the Giant Killer rolled into one.

John was right in the middle of a really thrilling battle with a Bengal tiger in the depths of India, who was in the habit of eating little native boys for dinner, when Betty suddenly stopped. "What happened next?" asked John breathlessly.

But Betty did not reply. She was staring at the path straight in front of her. Then she pointed. "Look, John," she said, "the fairies didn't forget after all. We just didn't look in the right place. Maybe, being wood fairies, they don't like to come into houses."

John forgot all about the tiger, and looked with keen interest. Lying on the path before them was a small yellowish coin. The boy's face fell. "It's only a penny," he said, but he picked it up.

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Betty looked. "It looks like my gold ring. I think it's fairy gold."

John turned it over, and then his eyes opened wide in astonishment. He spoke in an awed whisper. "It's a five-dollar gold piece!"

It did not occur to the children to wonder how wood fairies could coin five-dollar gold pieces in American money. Fairies could do anything, of course, but the generosity of the "Little People" fairly took the children's breath away. And the money must have been meant for them, since it had been left on their garden path right in front of their porch.

John and Betty ran to the little shop in the village. The old lady, who kept it, was very much surprised when the children laid a gold piece on the counter and asked for that much in fireworks, but she gave them what they wanted, after she rang the piece on the counter to see if it was good.

The children bought cap pistols, and boxes and boxes of caps. They got big firecrackers, middle-sized ones, and strings of little ones, that you could set off all together. They bought pin-wheels, torpedoes, fountains, and cones that snakes wiggled out of when the fire had all come out. Dan came in while they were there, and they loaded him up with a whole armful of the things for himself. Then they got a lot of sparklers, punk to light the things

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with, and a big box of red, white and blue candy canes. They had all they could carry when they started for Bobby Wayland's, for they had decided that since he had been so generous with his things in the morning, he should have the pleasure of helping them fire off theirs that afternoon.

Bobby was swinging lazily in a hammock under the trees when his friends hailed him. "Look!" cried Betty. "The fairies did remember after all!"

Bobby jumped out of the hammock and stared with all his eyes, while the things were dumped on the grass. Then he sighed. "I wish I'd wished too," he said.

Betty smiled. "You can have all of them you want," she said; "can't he, John?"

John was absorbedly lighting a piece of punk, and blowing on it to make it glow brightly. He nodded his head and grunted, without looking up.

Bobby suddenly beamed very brightly. "That's dandy!" he said.

A minute later Peter Wayland's housekeeper clapped her hands over her ears. "My goodness!" she said to Peter, who was writing his next Sunday's sermon. "If them children ain't gone and got some more o' them firecrackers! They'll be the death o' me yet!"

Peter just smiled and went on writing.

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John and Betty were quite tired out when they reached home that evening. It had been the grandest and most glorious Fourth they had ever had. Mother had come home and was just getting supper. The children trooped out to the kitchen, and sniffed the air inquisitively. They were hungry in spite of all the candy canes they had eaten. "What is it?" asked Betty.

"Turn-overs to catch meddlers," replied Mother smiling. "Did you have a nice time this afternoon?"

"H'm, h'm. Oh, I know what it is; chocolate pudding!"

Mother laughed. "Draw up the chairs, children, and we'll have supper."

They obeyed quickly.

During the meal they talked very little. In fact they were so sleepy that they could hardly hold up their heads until the last spoonful of pudding went down. Mother sent the children straight to bed after supper, and for once there was no protest; they were glad to tumble in.

After Mother turned out the lights and went down-stairs, John raised his head from the pillow, and gave a great yawn. He faced toward Betty's door and called, "Wasn't it great to-day?"

"H'm, h'm," murmured Betty drowsily. And in a moment they were both fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI

BUSINESS AND THE KING OF ENGLAND

THE next morning the children were up early, since they had gone to bed so soon the night before. They were both watching the orchard eagerly now to see what the warm sun would ripen first. They ran out to look this morning, and found that little soft places were coming in the yellow peaches, and a tree of early apples had flushed red. Betty picked an apron full of apples, because she thought they would be nice for sauce, even if they were not quite ripe enough to be sweet when eaten raw.

The children were just starting in, when Mother called John. Breakfast was nearly ready, but the sugar was short, and she wanted him to run to the little store at the end of the street and buy a pound. John ran up-stairs for Mother's purse, and brought it down. Mother opened it, and felt inside. Then she turned it upside down and shook. Nothing came out except a key and a railroad ticket.

"Are you sure you didn't spill anything out?" asked Mother.

John shook his head. "I didn't open it."

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Mother looked anxious. "Then I must have dropped it somewhere. I do hope it isn't lost."

"What is it?" asked Betty, beginning to look around on the floor.

"There were five dollars in the purse."

Betty pictured five dollars as a green bill with fives on it.

"Did you children see it?" asked Mother.

Betty shook her head, but John looked thoughtful. "There was a gold piece the fairies left in the garden," he said. "We'd wished for it in the wishing ring."

Mother laughed. "That must have been it. I suppose I dropped it, when I was starting for Aunt Bessie's yesterday. I'm so glad you found it, John. I don't know how I would have managed without it."

The children appeared anxious at that. John looked at Betty, and Betty looked at John. John licked his lips as if they felt dry. "We thought the fairies brought it, because it was gold and out in the garden, and we'd asked them," he said. "And we spent it for Fourth of July."

Mother turned rather pale. "All of it?" she asked.

He nodded.

Mother did not scold, because she saw the children had not meant to do anything wrong, but she

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was very thoughtful for a few minutes. "Well," she said at last, "it will be four days before my next salary comes in. I don't suppose we can really starve to death in that time. There's some mush for breakfast, and I see there are some apples ripe. We'll just have to manage somehow."

The children sat down and ate their mush. Mother was going to save her bowlful, but the children would not touch theirs until she ate too. Fortunately there was a whole quart of milk, but Betty did not like the mush without sugar. She had a great sweet tooth.

When Mother had gone in to the city, the two children sat in a tree out in the orchard, and talked the situation over. But they did not see any way out of it. By ten o'clock the mush was all digested and they began to feel ravenous. They were much hungrier than they would be ordinarily, just because there wasn't anything to eat. Betty made a lot of sauce out of the apples she had picked, but it was so sour that they could only eat a few spoonfuls.

They went into the orchard again. "Let's pretend we're savages, and eat what they eat," proposed Betty.

"What do they eat?"

"Oh, wild berries, roots, and grasses, and animals; most anything, I guess."

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“Well, we could try.”

So they hunted for grasses and roots and berries. They did find one kind of high grass that was sweet for about an inch near the base of the stem. They ate all they could find of it, but it was not very satisfying. The roots all tasted bitter and tough, so they did not eat any, and they could not find any ripe berries. They put out some fish lines in the duck pond, but the fish seemed to have all gone on a vacation. None of them bit. They even lay in wait for nearly an hour for a fat bullfrog. But he only poked his nose out of the water once in a while, and then ducked under again quickly before John could throw a stone. At last the children gave up in disgust. “I guess this isn’t a very good place to be savages in,” said John as they trudged back to the orchard.

Betty shook her head sadly.

They left the fishing lines still in the water with fresh worms on the hooks, in the hope that something might bite on them before night. The ends of the lines were tied to bushes on the bank.

Betty climbed a peach tree, and tried biting out the softer spots in the peaches, but they were still very sour, and she gave it up. With a sad expression, she watched a robin collecting his all-day meal. He ran along the ground perking his head from side to side listening. Then suddenly he

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poked his bill into the soft earth, and pulled and tugged mightily. Out came a fat worm. Mr. Robin gulped him down whole, and then preened one wing contentedly.

Betty sighed. "I wish I liked worms," she said.

"Let's go for a walk," proposed John.

"All right."

They walked in to town, and stopped outside Bobby Wayland's house. "I wonder if they've had lunch yet," said Betty thoughtfully.

"Let's see."

So they went in and asked for Bobby. The housekeeper answered their ring, and told them that Bobby and Peter had both gone in town for the afternoon, and would not be back much before supper time. The children walked away disconsolately; fate seemed to be against them. And they kept getting hungrier and hungrier. "If we're so hungry, I guess Mamma feels bad too," said Betty, who was gaining a dark blue thunder-cloud outlook, in proportion to the pain in her stomach.

The thought of Mother made them feel much worse, and they wandered aimlessly down to the little station looking as if they had lost their last friend in the world. In the afternoons Dan kept a little candy and paper stand down at the station. He was there now and saw John and Betty coming. He wondered at their long faces.

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Dan was eating a piece of chocolate. Betty looked at him hungrily. She knew it wasn't polite, but she couldn't help it. "Have a bar?" asked Dan, offering one.

"Thank you," said Betty quickly accepting it. She broke it and gave John half.

Dan watched the children devour it ravenously. He frowned thoughtfully. "Didn't you have any lunch?" he asked.

Betty shook her head.

"We aren't going to have anything but milk and apples for four days," said John almost a little proudly. After all there was a sort of distinction in it.

"Unless we can catch some fish," added Betty. "But they're not biting."

Dan hastily offered another bar. Betty handed it to John. "Put it in your pocket for Mamma," she said. He did so.

Dan wrinkled his forehead in thought, and scratched his head. Then, "Why don't you earn some money, and buy some stuff?" he asked.

"Oh, if we could!" and Betty's eyes were suddenly very bright.

"I think if you got some candy, and took it around to people, you could sell quite a lot," said Dan, speaking slowly. "You see, you pay five cents for a bar of chocolate and sell it for ten."

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“But we haven’t any money to buy it,” objected practical John, and he explained what had happened.

Dan hardly knew what to say after he had heard the tale. Betty felt grateful that he did not laugh at them, because they had believed in fairies. The older boy counted the change in his pockets, but there was not more than enough to buy his own supplies. “Why don’t you ask somebody to lend you the money?” he finally suggested. “I’d get you the candy along with my own things to-night. Mr. Wayland might let you have it.”

John hesitated, for he knew that Mother disapproved of borrowing. “We could pay it right back again to-morrow night,” Betty urged. “I don’t mind asking him.”

John gave in, for after all a stomach is a stomach. “But I’ll ask him,” he declared. “That’s a boy’s job.”

Betty made a little grimace, but she did not argue, for the main point had been gained.

John and Betty walked back to the parsonage, and Betty waited while her brother inquired for Peter Wayland. He was not home yet, so John said he would wait, as his business was very important. The housekeeper looked a little surprised, but she made no objection.

It was near sunset, so John asked Betty to go on

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and look after the fishing lines, and then hurry home, so there would be someone there when Mother arrived, and she would not be worried. He himself would wait for Mr. Wayland, and if he got the money, go on down to Dan's with it before he came home.

Betty ran as fast as she could, because she was a little afraid of the woods, when she was all by herself after dark. The sun, looking like an enormous Fourth of July fire balloon, was just resting its edge on the distant hills, when the little girl arrived at the pond. She came up all out of breath, but the last little puff she had she uttered in an Oh! of delight, as she saw one of the lines whipping back and forth. She pulled it in as quickly as she could, being careful to let out a little line, when the strain became too great. In a few minutes she had landed a really big catfish. As he lay flopping on the grass, his long whiskers and ugly little slaty blue eyes made her think of some absurd gnome, but more still she thought of the good dinner he would make.

Betty slipped the hook out of the fish's jaw, and then fastened him to a piece of line. Next she drew in the other lines. The fish seemed to have become hungry in the children's absence, for Betty found another smaller catfish, a sunfish, which she gently took off the hook and threw back, because he

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was so little, a small pickerel about a foot long, and a medium-sized yellow perch. As she pulled in the last line a small water turtle came with it. He was feasting on another perch, and the fish was about half eaten. Betty was cross and picked up a stone to throw at him. Then suddenly she lowered her hand again. Maybe the turtle had been very hungry, too. So she took off the rest of the fish, and threw it after the little turtle as he swam away.

Betty had quite a heavy string when she started home. She tied the line to a stick and swung it over her shoulder, so she could carry it more easily. Neither Mother nor John was home when she reached the house, so the little girl hastened to light the lamps and start supper so as to surprise them.

She turned on the drafts in the kitchen stove, so the fire would get hot while she cleaned the fish. When the fish was ready, Betty got out a big pan, and put it on the fire to heat. Then she found some lard left in a jar, greased the hot pan, and put in the fish, which she had salted. The delicious odor that rose as the fish browned made her dreadfully hungry. She hurried to set the table so that supper might be eaten as soon as Mother and John were home.

Just as the fish was browned to the last turn, Mother came in, and John with her. John sniffed

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vigorously. "Gee, that smells good!" he said, and Mother agreed without even correcting him for the exclamation.

Betty brought on a big platter of sizzling fish, more than anybody could eat, and they all sat down right away. Mother was ever so pleased and surprised.

Betty wanted to ask John if he had got the money, but she could not before Mother, because they had decided not to tell her about the adventure until they saw how it turned out. They knew she would worry about them, if she knew, because she always did worry.

The fish was really delicious. It was extra sweet and tender because it was just fresh out of the water. And then everybody was hungry. But at last they were through, and there was enough still left for breakfast. Then John remembered the chocolate. It was a little flat from being sat on, but, of course, that made no difference in the flavor. They made Mother eat all of it, much against her will, for they insisted that they had had so much they couldn't eat any more.

Mother looked very tired, so John made her sit down in an easy chair with a book, while he and Betty washed the dishes. As soon as they were alone in the kitchen, "Did you get it?" whispered Betty.

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John nodded. "Yes," he said. "And I gave it to Dan to get the candy."

"Oh, dandy!" and Betty danced a little jig of joy in the middle of the kitchen.

"Mr. Wayland wanted to give me ten dollars, but I only took five. I gave him my I. O. U.," proudly.

"What's that?"

"Oh, that's business. You give it to people when you owe them money."

"O-oh."

John was thoughtful for a few minutes, while he made such a dreadful noise scraping the frying-pan that Betty could not make herself heard. Then he laid down the knife and spoke. "I think Mr. Wayland likes Mamma quite a lot. He was ever so fussed when I told him about not having enough to eat. He didn't want me to pay the money back."

Betty set her lips firmly. "Oh, but we must. He's not like an uncle, or something like that." Then suspiciously, "What makes you think he likes Mamma so much? I haven't seen anything 'suspicious."

"The way he looks at her as if he'd like to eat her. And when I told him to-night about being hungry, he said, 'Poor little girl!'"

Betty frowned. "Maybe he meant me."

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Her brother shook his head. "No, I don't think he did. He didn't look that way."

The little girl rattled the dishes with unnecessary vigor. Then she spoke firmly. "We've got to pay him back to-morrow quick. We don't want him bothering around Mamma. If he tries, he's got to be stopped."

"How?"

"Well, we stopped that fat man in the city. I guess we can manage Peter Wayland," contemptuously.

John looked thoughtful. "I don't know. He's not fat, and he hasn't got any sloppy double chins," remembering quite clearly the parson's firm, square one.

"What's that got to do with it? You might think you wanted a horrid old stepfather!"

John stopped, struck suddenly motionless, with a plate poised in the air. "You think that's what he's after?"

The little girl nodded.

The boy's face grew anxious, and he scowled. "Well, if that's it, he's got to be stopped," grimly.

His sister beamed. "We'll stop him all right."

Meantime Peter Wayland sat in his study, frowning at his Sunday sermon, which he could not finish. Between him and the blank page kept flitting a sweet girlish face with bright dark eyes. It

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was unbearable to think that she should be hungry, while he had more than he ever could use. Someone ought to take care of her. He was going to himself, if she would let him. He wished he had given John fifteen instead of five dollars, and made him keep it. He must find out to-morrow how they were getting on.

CHAPTER VII

THE ROAD TO WEALTH

THE next morning, right after breakfast, while Mother went in town, the children ran across the fields to the duck pond and set fresh lines in the hope of fish for lunch. Then they hurried down to Dan's. Dan and his mother lived in a quaint little cottage on the edge of the town. It needed painting and new shingles badly, and it was smaller than the Stamfords' house, and less aristocratic because it had no porch, only steps. But the children could not help thinking it was a pretty little place, for green creepers grew over the walls, hiding the lack of paint, tall hollyhocks were just coming into bloom on either side of the front door, and the yard was full of old-fashioned, fragrant flowers.

Betty sniffed delightedly, and then she whistled to a funny-looking dog on the front steps, while she unlatched the gate. Dan came running out, and called, "Wait a minute," while he led the dog around to the side of the house and chained him to a small kennel under a big tree. "Now you can come in," said Dan.

The children entered, and Betty made a bee-line

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for the dog. "Don't get too near," warned the big boy.

"Does he bite?" asked John.

"Generally, unless he's used to you. You see, he's a bloodhound," proudly.

Both children stared with great interest. Betty immediately thought of the bloodhounds that had chased Eliza across the ice. She had always pictured them as enormous things about the size of ponies, with slathering jaws. She did not see quite so well why Eliza had been afraid of funny little dogs like this with bow legs and floppy ears, though, of course, even a tiny thing like a rat could bite hard. She knew, for she had picked one up once, and had to have a bloody finger disinfected and bandaged afterward.

The bloodhound regarded the children with his tongue hanging out and wearing a foolish expression. He wagged his tail. "I don't believe he'd bite me," stated Betty. "I think he likes me. I'm going to pet him." And she did. The bloodhound wagged his tail hard, and rubbed his head on her knees. "See? He's not cross to me."

Dan looked apologetic. "Well, he's only a puppy yet. He'll be a lot savager when he grows up. But he's great to trail. He can follow anything, with his nose on the ground. I take him hunting."

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John was very much interested. "If I went somewhere out of sight, could he find me?"

"Yes. If I gave him something to smell that you had handled, and said, find! he'd go straight to you. Why, he could follow a trail three days old, if it hadn't rained in between."

The children regarded the dog more respectfully now.

"What's his name?" asked Betty.

"Path-finder—from Cooper, you know."

"That's a dandy name. Mamma says it's so important to name people right, because if they get a good name, then they have something to live up to."

Just then Mrs. Wilson came out of the door with a big basket of clean clothes, which she began to hang out on the line, after smiling a greeting to the children. Betty picked up the bag of clothes-pins, and handed them to her as she needed them. She thought Mrs. Wilson was a very cheerful-looking person, with her ruddy cheeks and laughing blue eyes. Then she was ever so much bigger than Mamma, with large muscular arms. Maybe that was how she could wash so many clothes without looking tired.

When the clothes were all hung up, Mrs. Wilson said, "Thank you," and gave the children each two cookies. Then she went back to a tub full of suds and more dirty clothes. Betty ate her cookies, and

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watched while Dan's mother rubbed the clothes. As she wrung out a finished sheet, "You do have a dreadful lot of wash for two people, don't you?" said the little girl.

Mrs. Wilson threw back her head and laughed. "Bless the child!" she said. "These aren't all mine. I take in washing."

"O-oh." Then, "Does it pay well?"

"Fair. But it takes a lot of strength," and she gave a blanket a vigorous rub.

Betty regarded her own plump arms, and then looked at Mrs. Wilson's big ones. She sighed. Apparently wealth could not be attained by her through suds.

When John and Betty had finished their cookies, Mrs. Wilson lent them two baskets, and Dan put half the candy he had bought in each. It made rather a heavy load for the little girl, and she looked at the pile of little boxes and chocolate bars anxiously. "I do hope I can sell it all," she said.

Dan rubbed his ankle with his bare foot, and looked embarrassed. "If you find you've got some you can't sell, I'll take it for my stand down at the station," he said.

Betty smiled. "That's awfully good of you."

Mrs. Wilson beamed. "Dan's not much to look at, but he's got a good heart, and I know it."

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Dan blushed furiously, and shied a stone at a telegraph pole to cover his embarrassment.

John and Betty decided to start in the centre of the town, and work out in different directions. They drew straws to decide which should go north and which south. Betty drew south. She was rather glad, because she had hardly ever been in that part of the town, since it was the side farthest away from her own home.

Betty walked beyond the row of grocery and butcher shops, until she came to a block of neat two-story houses with clean front steps. No one was stirring outside, so she walked up the first set of steps, and rang the bell. A big Irish woman came to the door, wiping the suds from her hands onto her apron. Betty smiled engagingly. "Would you like to buy some candy?" she asked. "It's only ten cents a box, and all kinds." She showed her basket.

The woman's eyes twinkled. "Bless the smilin' face of you, I reckon I'll have to." And she felt in her apron pocket for her purse, from which she drew out a shining ten-cent piece. "Have ye got marshmallers?"

Betty produced a box promptly, and received the ten cents.

She tried the next house more confidently, firmly convinced of the value of a smile. No one was

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home here, and people at some of the places did not buy, but by the time Betty had finished the block, she had sold six boxes, and was jingling sixty cents in her pocket quite cheerfully. She began to feel a little sorry that John had not bought still more candy.

In the next block the houses were larger and set a little back from the street, with smooth lawns and gardens about them. Several children were playing in one of the gardens. Betty stopped and watched puss-in-the-corner for a minute. Then she went in. The youngsters spied her basket and crowded around. Betty showed them all the goodies she had. The oldest girl ran to the open door and called in excitedly, "Oh, Mamma, here's a little girl with some candy. Can't we get some?"

A nice-looking woman came out on the porch, looked over what Betty had, and bought four boxes. Betty departed with the firm belief that places where there were children were the best for selling candy.

After that several maids turned Betty away, and she made up her mind that if she were ever rich again, she would give her maids strict orders always to buy candy from little girls who brought it around. Betty was walking slowly past a place with an iron fence around the garden, when she noticed an old gentleman on the porch. He seemed



THE OLD MAN WAS POKING AT IT

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to be having difficulty of some sort, so the little girl opened the gate and went in. She set her basket on the porch steps, and walked up. Then she wished she hadn't come in at all; he was such a dreadfully cross-looking old man. He hadn't noticed her yet, because he had dropped the paper he had been reading and was busy trying to pick it up. The wind had carried it beyond reach of his hand near the porch railing, and the old man was poking at it with his cane. His feet were all wrapped up, and resting on a stool, so Betty felt sure he could not walk after the paper very easily. His hand trembled, and his cane really poked the paper farther away, instead of drawing it nearer.

Betty forgot to be afraid of his cross looks, because she was so interested. "I'll get it for you," she said.

The old man looked up very much surprised, and Betty picked up the paper and handed it to him. He grunted instead of saying thank you, and stuck the paper into the side of his chair, where it could not blow away again. Then he straightened his glasses and stared very hard at Betty. "Do you know," he asked in a rasping voice, "that I don't allow any children in here? Horrid little nuisances!"

Betty flushed. "I didn't know, and I don't think it's very polite of you to call me a nuisance,

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when I came in just to pick up your paper for you."

The old man snorted. "What's that basket on my step?"

"That's candy," she replied. "I've been selling it. I set it down when I came up." She picked up the basket, and started down the steps.

"Stop!" he ordered sharply. "Didn't you say you were selling that stuff?"

Betty nodded.

"Well, then," very disagreeably, "why don't you sell me some?"

Betty laughed and came back. "What kind do you like?"

"Don't like any of it. Have you got strawberry?"

"Oh, yes. Strawberry cream with chocolate outside," and she produced a package.

He looked at it. "That'll do. Give me five of them."

Betty gasped at his munificence, but she handed him the five packages and accepted the fifty cents, which he drew out of his waistcoat pocket.

He handed her back one of the packages. "Here," he said, "you'll have to help me eat some of this stuff, or you'll be guilty of having killed me with indigestion."

Betty set down her basket, perched on the porch

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railing, opened the box, and started eating the candy, but first she taught the old gentleman a lesson in politeness by carefully saying thank you. He only grunted and took a bite of candy. Suddenly Betty laughed.

“What are you giggling at?” he growled.

“Why, you make me think of a walnut.” He glared. “You see, you’re so ruggedly outside and awfully nice inside.”

Betty thought there was a twinkle in his eyes for a moment. Then, “H’mph!” he said. “Have another,” and he held out a second box.

The little girl accepted.

When they had finished the candy, and Betty was ready to go, “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Betty Stamford. I live over on the other side of the town.”

“Well, Betty, the next time you’re coming past, stop in.”

“Thank you,” said Betty, “I will.”

The old gentleman spread out his paper and began to read, so the little girl said good-bye and went on down the street.

After what the old gentleman had said about coming back again, Betty thought it would be a good idea to ask everybody if they would like to have candy regularly once a week. Most of them said they would, and Betty began to see a beautiful

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prospect of weekly pocket money and help to Mother, too.

Betty had only two boxes left when she turned into a quaint old place with big white pillars in front, high hedges and a neglected looking garden. The house was very big and lonesome looking, and the bell she pulled seemed to echo all through it. No one answered right away, and the little girl had decided there was no one home, when the door opened a little way.

A plump little old lady in a lavender dress stood peeping out with her hand still on the door-knob. Behind her stood another old lady in black, who was tall and angular. Betty smiled. "Would you like some candy?" she asked.

"Dear me!" said the plump old lady, opening the door a little wider. "Dear me! Would I, Mary?"

"Decide for yourself, Ellen," said the tall one.

"It's very nice, and only ten cents a box," said Betty with another smile.

"Well, I guess I would like some," said the plump lady, and opened the door all the way. "Won't you come in while I get the money?"

Betty stepped into a high dark hall, and the tall, thin lady showed her into the parlor, while the other one pattered off up-stairs. The little girl thought the parlor was very pretty, because it was

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all upholstered in red plush and gold braid, and there were such a lot of bright colored pictures of cats and puppies and fruit on the walls. She wished that Mother had fixed their parlor that way. And then suddenly she saw a huge yellow cat lying on a cushion on the window-seat. It had big golden eyes and long silky fur, and was quite the handsomest creature she had ever seen. "Oh, what a beauty!" cried Betty, and, setting down her basket, she hurried across the room.

The old lady fluttered after her. "Take care," she warned, "Boots doesn't like children."

But Betty was already stroking him with a gentle, soothing touch. Boots blinked his eyes and purred. The little girl beamed. "You see, he does like me. I guess he knows I love cats, 'specially yellow ones."

The plump little lady hurried in. "Here's the —— Well, I never!" stopping still as she saw Betty and the cat. "That's the first time I ever saw Boots take to a child."

The little girl looked up. "I think he's lovely; I wish I had one like him."

The old lady flushed with pleasure. Betty handed her the candy, after a reluctant parting with Boots, and received the twenty cents. Boots jumped down from his cushion and followed the little girl to the door, purring and rubbing.

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“Would you like some candy next week?” asked Betty.

“Yes, indeed,” replied the plump old lady. “Be sure to stop. It certainly is wonderful how Boots took to you.”

CHAPTER VIII

A DECLARATION OF WAR

It was a little after noon when Betty finally met John outside the drug-store as she had promised to do. He was sitting on the curb in the shade of a tree, trying to look patient. "I'm sorry I'm late," said Betty, hurrying up. "But it took ever so long to sell it all. And then some people wanted to talk, and I asked, and most of them said yes, they would like candy every week, if I brought it around."

John gasped. "Did you sell all of it already?"

"Yes, of course." And she showed him her empty basket, and her sagging pocket full of change.

Her brother regarded her respectfully. "Well, you were quick!"

Betty was very pleased, because John seldom paid compliments. "How much have you left?" she asked, sitting down beside him.

"I only sold two dollars' worth so far. Peter Wayland bought one." Betty frowned. "People didn't seem very hungry for candy."

"It's not the candy they like so much," replied

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Betty sagely. "It's the smiles." She emptied her change from her pocket into her lap, and counted it carefully. There was just five dollars, mostly in nickels and dimes. The little girl sighed with relief. "It's all there," she said. "We'll get some ice-cream at the drug-store for lunch. And then you take this money over to Mr. Wayland's and pay him back. After that I wish you'd go on home, and see if there are any fish on the lines yet, and get the house all tidy before Mamma comes home."

"But what about the rest of my candy?" asked John anxiously.

"Oh, I'll sell it for you, if you'll look after the house for me."

The boy smiled with relief. "Sure I will."

The ice-cream tasted delicious after the long walk in the sun, and the children ate it as slowly as possible, so as to make the flavor last longer. Finally they scraped up the last drop and laid down their spoons. Betty hung John's basket on her arm, and gave her brother the five dollars she had collected. He paid for the ice-cream, and then they went out together. On the sidewalk Betty paused. "I'll get the things for supper on my way home," she said. "And I wish you'd take my empty basket down to Dan's." John promised. "And," frowning, "when you pay Mr. Wayland

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back, you've got to thank him, of course, but then you might try stopping him just a little."

"How?"

"I don't know, but some way."

"I'll try to think of something," John promised.

As Betty set off down the street again, she hummed a little tune. Everything was going splendidly. She had no doubt she could sell the thirty little boxes in her basket. She had done fifty that morning. Mr. Wayland was to be paid off, and his possible course toward being a detested stepfather firmly checked. There would be money for a good supper, and enough left over to last the two days before Mother's salary came in. The little girl felt very pleased and self-satisfied.

Betty had turned toward the western end of the town this afternoon. The houses were small, and though they were full of children, the candy did not sell very fast. Most of them wanted just a penny's worth. The little girl tried dividing the candy in the packages up into ten equal parts, and then selling each part for one cent. She sold several boxes this way, but it was slow work.

At last Betty entered a country road beyond the town, after walking down a slope lined on each side with old boots, broom-handles and tin cans. She was very hot and dusty, so she sat down in the shade of a tree to rest for a minute and to count her

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wares. The little girl found that she had eleven boxes of candy still unsold. She sighed. It would never do to go back without finishing, but she was tired. She stared at the high stone wall across the road and wondered who lived behind it. They must be rich people to own such a big place and need such a high wall. Rich people had not proved the most generous customers that day, but Betty decided to try here. They might take one box anyway.

The little girl picked up her basket and walked slowly along by the wall watching for a gate. Presently she came to a big iron one. It was closed but not locked, and it swung open a few inches when she pushed it. Betty squeezed through and stood peering up a shady avenue that led to a big stone house. Someone in white was moving about on the porch, and in the shade of a tree, a little distance away, sat an old man in an armchair.

Betty approached a little shyly, for everything seemed so still and dignified. The old man was leaning back with his eyes shut, as if he had just dozed off for a moment, and the little girl thought she had never seen anyone handsomer. His snow-white hair waved back from a noble face, and his beard was like fine spun silk. Betty stood looking at him; he might be a king or a president, she thought. The old man stirred and opened his eyes.

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“Good-afternoon,” said Betty. “Would you like some candy?”

The old man rubbed his eyes. “Eh?” Then he smiled. “Where did you come from, little girl?”

“Oh, I came out from the town.”

“Didn’t you know it was lese majesty to come into the palace grounds without an invitation?”

“No, I didn’t know,” her eyes opening as round as saucers. “But I did think you looked like a king. Where are you king of?”

“You ought to say your majesty.”

“Where are you king of, your majesty, and is the queen here too—and the princes?” eagerly.

“I’m the King of England, but the queen and princes are all dead.” He sighed.

Betty looked sympathetic. “That’s too bad. We could have had such fun, the princes and John and me. I’ve never played with a real prince. But,” suddenly, “I thought the King of England always stayed in England—your majesty.”

“I’m traveling—for my health. And I always travel incognito. Nobody knows I’m the king; they all call me Mr. Brown. You mustn’t tell anyone.”

Betty promised, very much delighted at having a secret with the King of the British Isles. Also she offered him some candy, for she had an impres-

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sion, gained from her reading, that it was the proper thing to bring presents to royalty. But the King would not accept the candy for nothing, and insisted on buying all that Betty had left. The little girl was very curious to learn all about court life. What princes had to eat, how many dogs and horses they had, with whom they played, if they went to school; in fact, she intended to pump his majesty thoroughly of all information. But she had not much time. The King had just told her that princes had all the ice-cream they wanted, and a whole stable full of horses, when the figure in white began to walk down the avenue from the house.

The King seemed anxious. "You must go now," he said. "It wouldn't do for the Duke of Gloucester to see you. He's a peculiar fellow, and doesn't like people to talk to me when I'm resting in the afternoon."

Betty picked up her basket. "May I come again, your majesty?" she asked. "There are such a lot of things I'd like to know about."

"Yes, yes, but hurry; he's coming."

"Good-bye," said Betty, and ran quickly down the avenue, keeping in the shadow of the trees, so the Duke would not see her. She slipped through the gate again, and pulled it to behind her. Then she peered through the iron grill from behind one of

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the gate-posts, for she was curious to see the Duke. The King had leaned back and pretended to go to sleep again. The Duke must be a very imposing person to make a King afraid of him, thought the little girl. But when the Duke arrived, he proved to be a very ordinary looking man. In fact, there was nothing unusual about him, except the rather odd white uniform he had on. The uniform looked something like what the doctors had worn at the hospital, when Betty had gone with Mother to give toys to the poor sick children at Christmas time.

The Duke spoke to the King, who pretended to wake up suddenly. Then his majesty nodded and rose from his chair. He leaned on the Duke's shoulder, and walked with him toward the house. As Betty started home, she pondered with a puckered brow upon the problems of royal courts. She decided to ask John's opinion of the affair, and then she remembered that his majesty had asked her not to tell anyone. Well, she should have to see the King again later, and ask his permission to tell her brother. Maybe sometime when the King was through traveling he would ask John and her, and Mother, of course, to visit him in England. Wouldn't Bobby and Dan open their eyes then! And with her head full of rosy dreams, and her pocket jingling with change, Betty walked back to town, forgetting all about how hot it was. She

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stopped at the butcher's and grocer's, and bought things for supper and breakfast, then hurried home.

Meantime John had taken the empty basket back to Dan's, and played a game of marbles at the station, in which he had won three fine bull's eyes almost new, a rather worn aggie, and only lost one commony. John put his winnings in his pocket, and remembered his promised visit to Mr. Wayland.

Peter Wayland, dressed in white flannels and athletic shirt, was seated on his porch, his feet resting upon the rail, and a corn-cob pipe drooping from one corner of his mouth, when John approached up the gravel walk. The crunching of the boy's feet caused the minister to look up from the sporting page in which he had been absorbed. "Hello," he said genially. "What can I do for you?"

John took in the pleasing picture of healthy masculine youth, and felt his suspicions temporarily lulled to rest. "I came to get back my I. O. U.," he replied.

Mr. Wayland took a crumpled piece of paper out of his pocket and tossed it over. "I never wanted the thing anyway," he said.

John did not reply at once. He smoothed out the paper, examined it carefully, while the minister

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watched with an amused smile, then he put it in his pocket. Next he drew a handful of change from his other pocket and began counting it.

Mr. Wayland's expression changed promptly. "I don't want any of that," he said. "It's all right about the five dollars. I guess you'd do as much for me."

John looked up frowning. "Mamma says it's not right to owe anybody money," he said firmly. "You have to take it all back." And he went on counting.

"Well, but I won't have you going hungry. You can pay it back some other time."

John added the last quarter to the pile on the porch table. "We've got plenty to manage," he said. "And thanks for the loan." He hesitated.

"You ought to keep it as capital for your business."

John scuffed his toe against the porch floor. "No, we'd rather not." He was trying vainly to think of some way to get off without hurting Mr. Wayland's feelings and at the same time avoid being accused of remissness by Betty. He could not think of the right words, and was turning slowly away, when the minister called him back.

Mr. Wayland was oddly flushed. "You might tell your mother that I'll be over this evening with those photographs I promised to show her."

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The little boy stiffened. So he was guilty after all, self-convicted. John stared at the toes of his boots. "We'd rather you didn't come over," he said.

The minister started, and dropped his feet from the rail. "Eh! What?"

"We think it'd be better if you didn't come to our house any more," he repeated firmly.

The man stared. "Why?"

John scuffed again uncomfortably. "Oh, just because."

Mr. Wayland frowned and thought deeply. Then, "Who told you to say that?"

"Betty. But," hastily, "I'd have said it anyway."

The minister's face brightened amazingly. "O-oh, Betty, eh?" He chuckled. "And what's Betty's objection to me? What have I done to her?"

"Nothing. But we don't want you bothering around Mamma."

"You don't, eh?"

"And we're not going to let you marry her, so there!"

Peter Wayland's face set firm, and his chin protruded, though there was a suspicion of a twinkle in his eyes. "John," he said, "that's exactly what I'm going to do—if she'll have me."

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John spread his feet apart and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. "Then we'll stop you, that's all!" He turned with an air of finality and strode away.

Peter Wayland watched him go, with a pucker between his eyes.

John found Betty already home, and he told her about the interview while he helped her to prepare supper. Betty's outspoken admiration of his firmness in dealing with the situation pleased him immensely. It was seldom that his sister accorded him genuine admiration. "So it's war now," John finished.

"Yes, war!" echoed Betty, plunging her knife into a little speck in the potato she was paring with unnecessary force. Her eyes shone very brightly. "It's going to be great fun."

John looked doubtful, recalling Peter Wayland's firmness. "I don't know. He won't be scared off just because we're bad, you know, like the other one. He'd just want to reform us."

"I'd reform him," declared Betty scornfully. "Of course, we'll have to try all kinds of ways, 'til we find one that works." She reflected darkly. "I think a castle moat would keep him away for to-night."

"We could try it," agreed John.

CHAPTER IX

ENTERTAINMENT OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE

As soon as dinner was ready, John posted himself in the front window as a scout to announce Mother's approach, while Betty remained in the kitchen to watch the food and see that nothing burned. Presently John's warning whistle sounded, and instantly his sister set to work to put the dinner on the table. She had just finished when Mother entered the front door. The children ran to kiss Mother, and then rushed her straight to the dining-room.

Mother stared at the table in astonishment, while John and Betty hopped up and down with delight at her surprise. There were carefully browned steak, mashed potatoes, a big platter of fresh corn on the cob, baked apples with plenty of sugar and cream, and tea for Mother. The children made Mother take off her hat at once and sit down, and as they ate that delicious supper they told Mother all about how they had managed it. Mother was immensely proud of her two young financiers, though she did not like the idea of their starting a

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regular weekly candy route. Still she did not forbid them. Betty insisted on turning over the rest of the five dollars they had earned to Mother, and Mother agreed to lend them five dollars at the beginning of the next week, if they decided on the candy route.

After supper the children coaxed Mother to rest, while they rushed through the dishes at top speed. They were glad that she did not go out on the front porch, as that would have rendered their later work impossible. As it chanced, Mother sat down in the parlor to read the paper, and so was out of sight of the front path. The first dusk was falling as the children slipped from the kitchen, armed with spades and a bucket. Animated by a noble purpose, the protection of their mother, they forgot their fatigue and attacked the path a few feet inside the gate with vigor.

During half an hour's hard work, they managed to dig a hole the width of the path, three feet long and two feet deep. Without pausing to rest they began carrying water from the kitchen pump to the hole. After each bucket of water, they shoveled in a layer of earth. Before long the path was once more level, but for three feet it had been turned into a shivering quagmire. The children now strewed dust over the mud, and smoothed it off so that it might look as much like the rest of the path

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as possible. Then they regarded their handiwork with grim satisfaction. "I guess that'll stop him for one night," said Betty.

John smiled and nodded. Then he looked up. "Quick! Here he comes!" he said.

The children gathered up their tools, dropped them out of sight at the side of the house, and as Peter Wayland approached, vanished in a clump of bushes not far from the gate.

Peter Wayland was whistling "Sweet Adeline." He was slightly flat, but cheerful. He glanced about keenly for the youngsters as he entered the gate, but saw nothing of them. After all he did not consider their proclamation of war seriously. As the minister strode up the path, still whistling, he did not note the three feet of suspiciously smooth surface in the path. A moment later his song ceased with a dreadful flat, and he pitched forward upon his hands and knees in the softest mud he had ever met.

John and Betty clutched each other hysterically in the darkness of the bushes, striving to stifle their giggles. Peter Wayland was talking under his breath. "It's those young imps!" he muttered wrathfully. He rose and took stock of his appearance. A glance showed him that he was hopelessly bespattered from his waist down; a call was out of the question. Peter Wayland addressed the ap-

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parently empty garden. "It's your trick this time," he said, clearly. "I'm not going to tell your mother. But the first time I meet a certain young man alone, he's going to be sorry." And Mr. Wayland departed majestically.

When the minister had vanished in the dusk, the two conspirators came forth and carefully smoothed over the scene of the muddy tragedy. They knew the path would be dry and firm by morning. Both were highly delighted by the success of their first plot, but as they turned to go into the house Betty gave John a serious look. "I think I'd watch out for him for a while," she advised. "He sounded good and mad."

John chuckled. "I'll watch out all right," he promised.

The rest of the week passed without excitement, and without any further effort on Peter Wayland's part to "bother around." The children almost hoped that he acknowledged himself defeated. But when Sunday morning dawned bright and clear, and they found themselves confronted with the necessity of going to Sunday School, doubts revived. At Sunday School they would undoubtedly meet Mr. Wayland. Both shrank from the encounter.

Betty was combing her hair while John washed noisily. Betty finished carefully smoothing a curl.

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Then, "I don't think I feel so awf'ly good," she stated in a carrying tone.

Across the hall John raised his dripping face from the wash bowl. "Huh? What'sa matter?"

Betty laid down the comb. "I don't feel well enough to go to Sunday School. I—I gotta cold." She coughed as evidence.

John reflected deeply. Then, "My throat feels kinda funny this morning. I guess I got a cold too." He hawked experimentally.

Betty sniffed an attractive odor of broiling bacon and hot biscuits that arose from below stairs. "Let's not cough too much 'til after breakfast," she suggested wisely.

"All right. I'll beat you down."

"You will not."

And there followed a wild scramble ending in a tie.

A little later Mother was very much surprised to find that these two healthy appearing young people, who had just broken all records for the size of breakfast consumed, were really invalids. Both had a very convincing cough. Betty was far too wise to suggest to Mother that she felt too ill for Sunday School, but after about the twelfth cough, Mother declared against it herself. Mother got down from the shelf a big bottle of Aunt Mary's cough remedy. John grinned with pleasure; both

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children loved the syrupy stuff. Mother dosed them liberally and she set down the gradual cessation of coughing to the excellent action of the medicine. Really Aunt Mary ought to patent that remedy; it was remarkable how quickly it acted.

The invalids recovered so fast that Mother decided it was not necessary for her to stay home from church on their account. She left them sitting on the front porch. They watched her down the road. "We ought to have stayed sick a little longer," said Betty sadly. "Now he'll have a chance to talk to her."

"Oh, well, he can't say much with all the ladies crowding around."

"N-no, I s'pose not."

"What'll we do 'til Mamma gets back?"

"We might go for a walk. Oh, I know. There's a secret. I'll take you, and ask him if I can tell."

John fairly boiled over with curiosity on the way to the King's palace, but Betty kept her word; she would not tell without permission. At last they arrived, and Betty looked through the gate. There was no one in sight. The children waited quite a long time, but not a soul appeared except another man in one of the white uniforms. Betty wondered what kind of a duke he might be, but she was afraid to speak to him after the King's warning.

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At last the children started home, John very dissatisfied. In the masculine fashion, he insisted on stating that there was no fascinating secret, just because Betty wouldn't tell him what it was.

The children walked home by the road that ran past the duck pond and down through the woods. Presently John forgot his grievance about the secret and proceeded to air a new accomplishment. He whistled through his front teeth, producing notes much like those of a robin. A red-breasted fellow poised on a fence-post perked his head this way and that looking for the songster. Betty tried to imitate, but accomplished only an ugly hissing sound, which frightened the robin away. John laughed. In self-defense the little girl whistled with her lips, "Bob White, Bob White." A Bob White answered from a near-by field.

"Oh, anybody can fool a Bob White," said John.

Betty ignored the remark. There is no use arguing with some people.

The children were passing the duck pond now. They sniffed the air. The breeze passing over the water had that tang which means good fishing. Betty paused. "I guess if you caught all the fish in there, and sold them, you'd make about a million dollars."

John was interested. "If I had a million dollars, I'd buy a bicycle and a gallon of ice-cream."

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“I’d get a new dress for Mamma, and—and a yellow cat.”

John continued. “And I’d have a dog and a horse, and lots of haymows to play in, and ——”

Betty interrupted. “Bobby says Farmer Mann has a lovely haymow. We might ask Mamma to let us go over some time.”

John nodded. Then a sudden thought appeared to strike him. “If Peter Wayland married Mamma, what relation would Bobby be to us?”

“Well, he isn’t going to, so what difference does it make?”

“I know he isn’t, but just supposing?”

Betty knit her brows and thought hard. “Daddy’s brother is our Uncle John, so I guess he’d be a kind of step-uncle.”

John frowned. “Wouldn’t he be stuck up though, if he was our uncle?”

His sister agreed. “Yes, there’d be no living with him.”

“He’s got to be on our side about this, or else we’ll have to stop playing with him.”

Betty looked rather alarmed. After all, Bobby was their only satisfactory playmate. But of course, it would be wrong to encourage Bobby to be their stuck up uncle. She suggested that they sound his feelings on the subject when next they met. Then if Bobby could not be convinced of the

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true course of thought, they might let him severely alone for a time, until he came to his senses.

The children were about two blocks from home, when they saw a group of six or seven little boys coming up from the brick row. Generally John and Betty ignored these children, except for keeping a sharp eye out for a slyly flung stone. They were not permitted to play with "bad" boys. But this time Betty saw that they were carrying something, and drawn by curiosity, she went nearer. A dog was following the little crowd, yapping excitedly.

"What have you got?" called Betty.

A small boy with a grimy face held up something furry and yellow. "It's my kitty," he said. "My Mom won't have 'im any more. She says he ain't no good, so we're gonna give 'im to Brownie." He smiled in anticipatory glee, and Brownie barked and snapped excitedly.

The little girl's heart fluttered. A yellow kitten! And they were going to give it to the dog to kill! Any kind of kitten was too good for such an end—but a *yellow* one! Betty smiled falsely. "Let me see him just a minute, will you?" she asked.

The boy handed him over proudly for inspection. The kitten nestled down into Betty's soft arms confidingly. "He's an awfully nice kitty,"

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said the little girl, "ever so much too nice to kill."

The boy became suspicious. "Here! You just give 'im back. He's mine, an' I've a right t' do what I likes with 'im."

The other boys, fearing interference with their innocent pleasure, muttered approval, and shuffled nearer.

Betty flashed a glance at John. "Guard!" she snapped, and quick as a wink she had turned and was bolting down the street.

The boys shouted and made after her. But the first of them fell over John's outstretched foot. Three more tripped over the fallen one, and the rest were blockaded for a moment. John fled. The children were almost to the gate, but the boys were gaining fast, when they perceived Mother approaching with Mr. Wayland. There was no chance to turn and escape. John tripped a boy, who was about to seize Betty, flung open the gate and tried to cover her escape to the house. But in a moment the pursuers were upon them. John punched and his sister kicked valiantly, but the odds were too heavy.

At that moment Peter Wayland ran up and laid about him with his cane. Several boys rushed to a distance howling, the rest drew back. "What's all this?" he demanded.

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Betty showed the kitten. Her dress was torn, and there were black and blue spots growing on her arms, but she had carried the little creature through safely. The little girl found her throat oddly choked up, and though she knew it was babyish to cry, there were tears rolling down her cheeks. "They were g-going to g-give it to the d-dog," she gasped.

The minister's face flushed. "The little brutes!" he said.

The boys fled discreetly.

"Bring it into the house, dear," said Mother. "It must be dreadfully frightened."

Set down on the kitchen floor the kitten proceeded to make himself at home. He examined all the furniture very carefully with his pink nose, and registered his approval with a pleased expression. Then he rubbed against his rescuer's ankles and purred ingratiatingly. Betty stroked his thin sides gently. "Don't you think he's pretty, Mamma?" she asked proudly.

Mother appeared doubtful. "He might be, if he looked a little less like a living skeleton. I think he'd better have some milk."

Betty ran for the milk jar, and heated a big saucerful. The kitten watched eagerly, and as the task was completed he mewed plaintively. "Little Tommy Tucker, singing for his supper," chanted

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Betty, as she set the saucer on the floor for him. "Only it's really lunch," she added. "I think Tommy Tucker would be a nice name for him."

John agreed and Mother made no objection, so the vote was passed.

Tommy Tucker proved himself a perfect gentleman. He was evidently starving, but he did not gobble his dinner. He lapped the milk all up daintily, taking care not to wet his whiskers, and then he polished the saucer. Next he sat up, and though he was so weak that he could hardly balance himself, he took a painstaking bath from nose to tail.

Betty made a bed for Tommy with a basket and an old blanket in one corner of the kitchen, and when he had finished his toilet, he curled up and went sound asleep.

After luncheon, John and Betty held a consultation on the situation of the war. Both felt that Peter Wayland's efficient defense of Tommy Tucker had somewhat altered matters. It is difficult to remain in the position of an enemy toward someone who has just done you a big favor. At the same time the children's feeling had not changed in the least in regard to the question of stepfathers. At last they decided to put it up to Mr. Wayland himself. If he would stop trying to

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be their stepfather, then they would no longer try to keep him from being it. This arrangement appeared to them sweetly reasonable.

CHAPTER X

REPENTANCE

It was only the next afternoon that the children met Peter Wayland down-town. The minister's eyes lighted at sight of them. He took a long step forward, and seized John firmly by the shoulder. "If it weren't for yesterday, I'd give you a good thrashing for that trick you played on me, young man," he said.

John's features oozed innocence. "What trick?"

The minister gave him a little shake. "That patch of mud. It never got into a perfectly dry path by accident."

Betty caught her brother's cue. "O-oh! You mean the castle moat. We thought it looked as if someone had stepped in it," with a little smile of pleased recollection.

"S-stepped in it!" he spluttered.

"You see," gently, "John and I often play castle, and you have to have a moat. We didn't know you'd walk in it—at least John told you not to come."

Peter Wayland flushed very red. "When

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I'm your father, you are going to learn not to be impertinent to your elders."

Betty lost her temper; not an infrequent thing for her. When she was born, she had had bright red fuzz all over her head. Flaxen curls had replaced it later, much to Mother's relief, but a red-headed temper had remained. The little girl stamped her foot. "You're not our father, an' you're never going to be, an' you let John go, or—or ——" She looked around furiously for an alternative.

Mr. Wayland decided that he was going the wrong way about things. He took his hand from John's shoulder, and spoke in a tone of calm reason. "Betty," he said, "why don't you want me for a stepfather?"

But Betty was beyond the appeal of reason. "'Cause—'cause I hate you, an' you're horrid! So there!" And she ran away raging.

John was much affected by his sister's emotion. He doubled up his fists and faced the minister firmly. "You let my sister alone," he said, "or—or I'll punch you one!" And he marched away with dignity.

Peter Wayland removed his straw hat and rumbled the brown curls, which were secretly admired by many ladies of his congregation. He was frankly perplexed. He admitted he did not

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understand child psychology; not this kind. Bobby had always been so easy to get on with, but this little tornado! And the children had managed to make him feel as if he were the one in the wrong, while it was quite evident that they were the ones really at fault. The minister spent a considerable amount of time puzzling over the situation. Finally he decided that the only way to handle a woman, young or old, was through conciliation. The rights of the case had nothing whatever to do with it. A lady was always right—in her own opinion.

Mr. Wayland stopped at the drug-store, and purchased a pretty little box of chocolates. Candy has always been used to soothe angry ladies. Then after considerable hesitation over different styles of boxes, the minister picked out a large box of bonbons, which he felt was in sufficiently good taste, and at the same time handsome enough to be in some degree worthy of Mrs. Stamford.

Meantime Betty ran home raging all the way. Nothing short of violence would be a sufficient revenge in her present mood. She hurried into the kitchen, picked up two large potato baskets, and rushed out into the orchard with them. John followed. Betty began to fill one of the baskets with green apples and pears, that had been blown down by the wind. John did the same with the other.

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Before it was time to get supper for Mother, the children had both baskets piled full, and hidden in a clump of bushes at one side of the garden path.

“If he comes again to-night, we’ll show him!” said Betty vindictively.

John looked thoughtful. “Suppose Mamma finds out?” he asked.

The little girl scowled. “If she does, we’ll just tell her what he’s up to,” she said.

That evening directly after supper, Peter Wayland started on his peace expedition. The sun was still up, and the birds were whistling and twittering overtime through the long July evening. Mr. Wayland did not feel like battle; he was glad that he had thought of a way of making peace with his small enemy. The Stamfords’ garden looked very quiet, as he swung open the gate. Evidently the children were in the house. However, the castle moat had left its impression upon the minister’s memory, for as he entered, he did not tread upon the path, but on the grass at one side.

At that moment a hail of green fruit beat upon Peter Wayland’s tall form. John was probably as fast a thrower as any boy in the countryside. Betty was certainly the superior of any girl. Both of them had perfected the art through long practice. An apple carried away the minister’s hat; a

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pear, directed with the full force of John's right arm, caught him in the neck; a specially hard specimen struck his shin; all this before he could turn. But Mr. Wayland was no coward. He forgot about the peace mission, turned, and charged the battery with a shout. He was quite close when an apple thrown by Betty hit him in the eye. It struck rotten side front, but the result was painful as well as unpleasant.

Peter Wayland paused a moment to clap his handkerchief to his injured eye, and wipe it clear. His opponents seized the opportunity to escape. Before the angry man could catch them, they were over the garden fence, and running across the neighboring field.

It was now that a new factor entered the combination, for Farmer Mann's bull had been put in that field to graze only that morning. Betty had forgotten her red hair ribbon and sailor tie until she saw the bull look up, shake his horns, and start toward her at a trot. Peter Wayland saw the danger at the same minute. He paused on top of the fence. "Come back!" he shouted anxiously.

But Betty saw a tree no farther away than the fence, and a mischievous gleam came into her eyes. "The tree!" she whispered to John, and bolted for it.

A moment later Betty was scrambling up,

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boosted vigorously by her brother. The little girl gripped hold, crouched, and reached down one hand to help John in turn. It was then that she saw out of the tail of her eye something that she had not counted on. The bull had stopped trotting. He was charging head down at a tremendous pace, and he was almost upon them. Betty gave a frantic jerk at her brother's hand, that almost brought her down to share his danger. But somehow she kept hold, and he made the limb, just as the bull charged past with a roar.

Peter Wayland paused part way across the field, where he had been dashing to the rescue. "Thank heaven!" he murmured. Then, "Wretched little imps!" He meant both exclamations.

John and Betty climbed quickly to a thick branch higher up, where they were quite safe for the time being. The bull tossed his head, tore up the earth with his feet, and bellowed his disappointment. Then he spied the minister. Even a parson would do as an enemy in his present frame of mind, and the bull started for him. The children chuckled at the undignified haste with which Mr. Wayland flew back over the fence. The bull roared defiance across the fence, and then returned to take up his guard under the tree.

"Do you s'pose he'll watch all night?" asked Betty, beginning to feel a little anxious.

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John shook his head doubtfully. "I guess he'd go to sleep, and we could slip away. Anyhow it's worth it," and he smiled reflectively.

Meantime the bull's bellows had brought Mother hurrying out just in time to see Peter Wayland leap over the fence. She turned pale. "Why, Mr. Mann said the bull wasn't dangerous at all!" she cried.

The minister turned toward her a face decorated by a slowly purpling eye. "He wouldn't be, if he hadn't seen Betty's red ribbons."

A look of wild anxiety came into Mother's face. She stared all around. Then she wrung her hands and hastened toward the fence. "Oh, where is my little girl?" she cried.

Peter Wayland forcibly restrained her from crossing the fence, while the bull looked in their direction with an interested expression. "She's all right," he insisted. "They're both up in the tree and perfectly safe."

Betty saw Mother at the fence, and waved her handkerchief to reassure her. Mother waved back vigorously, while she heaved a sigh of relief. "Hold on tight!" she called. Then a fresh anxiety assailed her. "Oh, dear!" she cried. "Suppose one of them should slip and fall!"

"No danger!" soothed Mr. Wayland. "Besides, I can lure the beast over to the other side of

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the field, and that will give the children time to climb down and get over the fence."

But Mother shook her head vigorously. "I wouldn't dare; just think if they shouldn't make it!"

The minister, recalling the youngsters' monkey-like speed, had no doubts, but Mother was not to be persuaded. "No," she said. "You must go call Mr. Mann. He can drive the bull off, if anyone can." And Mother cried a little.

Now everyone knows that it's perfectly impossible to argue with a pretty lady when she cries, so Peter Wayland set off across the fields to Farmer Mann's. But Mr. Wayland's irritation caused him to do a foolish thing. He scorned to walk clear around the bull's field, when Mrs. Stamford was watching him, so he cut across one corner of it. The bull set out for him briskly. The minister stalked along firmly for a few moments, but he had to finish at an undignified gallop. The two little rascals in the tree chuckled delightedly as the black coat tails flopped over the fence, but Mother hardly noticed. All her attention was centred upon the tree.

Peter Wayland found Mr. Mann seated on his front porch, reading the paper in the last rays of the setting sun. The farmer listened to the minister's brief statement. Then he removed his clay

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pipe from his mouth and spoke. "Is them Mrs. Stamford's kids thet you're tellin' about?"

Mr. Wayland nodded.

Farmer Mann stood up with a jerk, and laid his paper down on the seat of his chair. He delivered the milk every morning, and, like every other man who saw the children's mother, he found Mrs. Stamford entirely charming. "I'll be right over," said Mr. Mann. "I reckon she'll be clean scairt to death." He did not mention whether he meant Betty or her mother.

When Farmer Mann had set off at a run, carrying a pitchfork, Peter Wayland felt gingerly of his injured eye, and the sore place on his neck, and then with a wry grimace he started homeward. It was not 'til then that he realized that he was still carrying the boxes of candy firmly clutched under one arm. He paused and looked back. Then slowly he turned and started once more across the fields.

The bull had been driven ignominiously away to a far distant pasture, and Mother was hugging her rescued offspring, when Mr. Wayland once more arrived. "Thank you so much for calling Mr. Mann," said Mother gratefully. Then she regarded the minister more closely. "Why, whatever is the matter with your eye?" she asked.

Peter Wayland scowled at Betty, and that

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young lady wriggled uncomfortably. "It got hit with something," he said. The little girl heaved a sigh of relief; he hadn't told after all.

"I should say it had!" said Mother. "Come right in the house and let me bathe it, and put on something to stop the swelling. It will be a dreadful sight, if it keeps on like that."

The minister began to feel almost glad Betty had hit him, since his sad state had aroused Mother's sympathy. "All right," he agreed. "But first here are a couple of things I brought over for you and Betty." And he held out the boxes of candy.

Mother accepted hers with polite admiration for his good taste and kindness, but Betty stared at her box as if it were the head of Medusa, which turned all spectators to stone. A crowd of thoughts and emotions were rushing through her little head. It was this man, whom she had given a mud bath, to whom she had talked horridly, whom she had given a black eye, and caused to be chased by a bull; and he brought her candy, the most precious thing in the world to a person with a sweet tooth! He was heaping coals of fire with a vengeance, for it was not just a bag of sweets but a whole beautiful box, which he had brought.

Betty gulped and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. The gulp turned into a sob, and with a subdued howl of anguish she turned and fled into

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the house. The minister was surprised, though he probably understood, but Mother was astonished. Mother hurried into the house after Betty, but the little girl had already fled up-stairs to her room, and sounds of sorrow issued faintly through the door she had just slammed. Mother paused at the foot of the stairs, divided between anxiety about her daughter, and duty toward her guest. Presently she decided in favor of the latter, and with a puzzled sigh she ushered Peter Wayland into the parlor. "Betty is such a strange child. I can't understand her," she said.

The minister felt his swollen eye, and smiled a little grimly. "I'll leave the candy on the table for her," he said.

Mother bathed the eye gently, and then she brought a piece of ice wrapped in a soft cloth, and bade him hold it to the swelling until it began to go down.

Peter Wayland watched Mother tenderly from his good eye, while he held the ice to the other. It seemed to him that Mother was looking daily more tired and frail, though he was sure she could never appear less charming. The trying July weather had drawn blue shadows under her bright eyes, and her slim wrists seemed thinner than they should be. The minister shifted nervously in his chair. "See here, Mrs. Stamford," he said, "that work in the

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city every day is getting too hard for you. I think it's high time you dropped it."

Mother raised her brows with an amused expression. "Well, one must eat, you know."

Mr. Wayland leaned forward earnestly, forgetting all about the ice for his eye. "Let me take care of you, Betty," he said. "I'd do anything in the world I could for you and the children."

Mother flushed damask rose. "Don't be absurd," she replied. "And if you don't hold that ice on your eye, I won't be responsible for how it will look in the morning."

"Bother the ice!" said Peter Wayland, dropping the cloth on the floor, and rising abruptly. He walked over 'til he stood just in front of Mother. "Marry me, Betty," he pleaded, taking her slender little hands in his, "and I can make everything easy for you, and—and the children will have Bobby to play with all the time, and ——"

Now little Betty was her mother's own daughter so far as independence of spirit was concerned. If Peter Wayland had begged Mother to take care of him, he would have touched her tender heart. As it was he outraged her pride dreadfully. Mother jerked her hands away and interrupted him rather sharply. "I'm sure John and Betty already play with Bobby as much as could possibly be good for so meek a child," she said.

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The minister flushed. "Bobby isn't meek," he defended. "He's only well-behaved and obedient."

This was as much as to say that Mother's little angels were not so, and that, after they had just escaped with their lives from a frightful situation. Mother's eyes flashed. "Bobby is too good," she declared. "He hasn't the spirit of a kitten."

Peter Wayland saw his mistake. "Bobby is not the question, anyway," he said. "It's simply this. Will you marry me?"

"I will not," replied Mother, with spirit.

"Do you mean that?" demanded Mr. Wayland, heatedly.

Mother gasped. "Certainly I do!"

Peter Wayland strode out of the house without another word. When he had gone, some of the color faded out of Mother's cheeks. She appeared less angry; perhaps she was even a little sorry. But then he had really been quite impossibly masterful and disagreeable; she stiffened again. But Mother would really have felt a little sorry, if she could have seen the dejected droop of the young minister's shoulders, as he swung the garden gate to behind him.

Presently Mother remembered Betty and her odd conduct. She turned resolutely, as if putting away a difficult subject, and ran up-stairs to see what was the matter with the child. Mother

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opened the door softly. The little girl was lying on her cot bed, all rolled up in a ball like a caterpillar when one touches its head. Her face was burrowed into her folded arms, and none of it showed except a narrow strip of pink cheek. Now and again a convulsive sob shook her.

Mother closed the door gently, and came and sat on the edge of the bed. She put her arms around the child soothingly. "What is the matter, dear?" she asked.

Betty sniffed mournfully. Then, "L-lots." She sobbed.

Mother hugged her closer. "Come, tell me why you're crying, sweetheart."

Betty snuggled up, and hid her flushed face on Mother's sympathetic breast. "It's 'cause I was horrid to him—an' muddied him—an' blacked his eye—an' everything, an'" — sob — "then he brought me candy!" She wailed afresh.

Mother stiffened with horror. "Who?" she asked, with a dreadful foreboding.

"P-Peter Wayland."

Then he had been right in his criticism and she wrong. He had been the most magnanimous of men, tried to the extreme. But instead of the justification of Mr. Wayland making her feel glad, it made her unaccountably angry. It is very unpleasant to feel oneself in the wrong, and we are

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apt to blame the one toward whom we have been unjust. Mother found her voice again. "Why did you do those dreadful things, Betty?" she asked.

"'C-cause he wanted to be our horrid s-stepfather—an' John told him he couldn't, an' he said he would, an' we were trying to stop him."

All at once Mother had a ridiculous desire to laugh. "But don't you see it was my part to stop him?" she asked.

Betty sniffed. "We didn't want him bothering you."

For no reason at all Mother sighed. "Well, I've told him that he's never going to be—your stepfather, so you mustn't think any more about it." Betty brightened. "Now tell me just what you and John did do."

The little girl unfolded the whole sad tale. Mother was alternately amused and shocked. When the story was finished, Mother talked very seriously to Betty about the way to act toward grown-ups, and she made the little girl promise to tell her all about it, before ever starting another war against anybody. Also Mother told Betty that she must go over to Mr. Wayland's in the morning, return the candy, and apologize for the things she had done.

Betty did not mind apologizing. When she was

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really sorry for anything she had done, she fairly reveled in confession. But taking back the candy was a real punishment. Still she promised.

CHAPTER XI

A ROYAL FUGITIVE

WHEN Betty arrived with the candy the next morning, she found Mr. Wayland sitting on his porch, pretending to read the paper with his one good eye; a bandage was over the other. But really he was staring off into space with the sulky expression of a spoiled little boy, who thinks that he is very much abused. As Betty mounted the steps, he looked toward her, and pretended to wince. "Well, have you got any more apples to throw?" he asked in a disagreeable tone. "I've still got another eye you could blacken."

The little girl flushed. "I'm sorry I hit you, and I brought back the box of candy, b-because I don't deserve it." Her lips quivered.

"For pity's sake don't start crying again," said the minister hastily, and appearing a little mollified. "I'm the one who ought to do the crying, since it was my eye that got hit."

Betty regarded the bandage with interest. "Is it very bad?" she asked.

"It's a beauty, and I have a dickens of a time trying to explain to everybody how I got it. They

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swallow what I say, and then they wink. They're all sure I was in a fight, and a minister isn't supposed to fight. You've ruined my reputation, Betty."

The little girl's eyes twinkled. "I'm sorry. Anyway, here's the candy." And she held out the box.

Peter Wayland looked uncomfortable. "Oh, well, you might as well keep that now. Lots of people get things they don't deserve."

"Mamma said I had to give it back," insisted Betty, firmly.

"Then hand it over." She did so, but without enthusiasm. She had not even seen the inside of that beautiful box. The minister watched her sharply. He balanced the box on his broad palm. "Now you've done what your mother told you, haven't you?"

Betty nodded sadly.

"But she didn't say I couldn't give it back again afterward, did she?"

It was as if a sunbeam had struck across a cloudy sky. The little girl's face suddenly shone brightly, as she slowly shook her head. "No."

"Well, I'm giving it to you over again," and he held out the box.

Betty accepted delightedly, and no longer able to resist its attractiveness, she tore open the box at

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once. With difficulty remembering to be polite, she offered it to the minister first. He accepted, and a moment later a piece had popped into Betty's own mouth. "It's awf'ly good," she said, with her mouth full.

"Glad you like it," replied Peter Wayland politely. He realized that at last peace was entirely restored.

Betty was silent a moment from pure pleasure. Then she spoke. "The funny thing is that we needn't have tried to stop you at all. Mamma was going to her own self."

The minister appeared not to see the joke. He glowered.

The little girl observed him closely. "Does it make you feel bad?" she asked.

"How would you feel if your mother told you she wouldn't be your mamma any more, and you'd have to live with somebody else?"

"She wouldn't!" replied Betty with conviction.

"But suppose she did?"

The little girl's active imagination set to work. "I guess I'd feel awful bad."

"So do I."

Betty wrinkled her forehead in profound thought. Then, "But she's not your mamma."

Peter Wayland sighed with exasperation. "It's all the same thing, if you love anybody."

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"Then it's silly to love anybody," replied the little girl, unsympathetically, as she bit into a delicious marshmallow.

"That's right, hit a man when he's down. I knew you hadn't any sense of fair play."

"I'm not, and I have so," indignantly. "Besides, you're not down, are you?"

"Do I look up?"

Betty inspected his gloomy face. "N-no, you don't."

Peter Wayland stared out across the sunny lawn. His expression was such as one wears at a particularly painful funeral.

Betty thrust the rest of the box of candy into her capacious pocket. She always insisted on extra large pockets in all her dresses. She advanced to the steps, and then paused to glance back. "I'm sorry," she said. She spoke with that cheerful sympathy which one displays toward the sorrows of others.

"Thank you," said Peter Wayland.

It was a few days later that Betty decided to really start a weekly candy route. Mother lent her the five dollars, as she had promised, and Dan ordered the candy. John helped her sell it as before, but this time she only trusted him with a couple of dollars' worth, as she had greater faith in her own powers of salesmanship. Betty covered the old

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route, stopping at all the houses where she had promised to return. The grouchy old man seemed really quite pleased to see her again, and the little girl assured the plump Miss Ellen and the tall Miss Mary that she had a yellow kitty now almost just like Boots, only not nearly so big.

Betty had taken her luncheon with her, and she sat down under a big tree by the roadside to eat it before going on to the King's. She felt quite sure that he would buy the rest of her twelve boxes, if he should happen to be about. Betty threw bits of bread from her sandwiches to a squirrel, and exchanged grimaces with him while he ate them. She felt very well satisfied with herself and the world. As she set off down the road again, her pocketful of change jingled cheerfully.

When the little girl arrived at the palace grounds, she peeped eagerly through the grated gate. At first she thought the King was not there, for she did not see him under the tree where he had been before. But presently she spied him in his chair a little farther up the avenue on the other side. He was reading a book, and the Duke was nowhere in sight.

Betty pushed the gate open a few inches and slipped through. The King did not hear her soft footfalls until she stood before him. He glanced up quickly, then smiled and closed his book.

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"Well, well!" he said. "I thought you were never coming back."

Betty was delighted to be remembered by royalty. "I did come back once, your majesty," she said, "but I didn't see you."

His majesty sighed. "No, the Duke doesn't let me come out by myself very often; he's much too officious. He pretends he's anxious about my health, but really he's trying to get rid of me."

The little girl's eyes opened wide. "He wouldn't dare!"

But the King nodded sadly. "I'm afraid he would."

Betty frowned, and thought deeply. This revelation of the intrigues of royal courts shocked her, though she admitted that she should have expected it, after all the Shakespearean plays Mother had read to her and John. The people in *King Lear* and *Richard Third* had all done things just as bad.

The King looked all around carefully for eavesdroppers; then he leaned forward and whispered: "I'm quite sure now that it was the Duke of Gloucester, who killed the Queen and the Prince, too." He leaned back to observe the effect of the communication.

Betty was much distressed. "How dreadful!"

"And now he wants to kill me, so he will be king instead."

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"You ought to get back to England right away," advised Betty, "and tell the people what he's doing, and they'd stop him."

"That's what I want to do, but he won't let me have enough money to go, and while I was writing to the treasury, and waiting for money to come from England, he'd catch me and shut me up again."

"Why don't you stay at our house? He'd never catch you there."

But the King shook his head. "No, it wouldn't do for so many people to know, and he'd be sure to look there. But I might hide in the woods, if you would mail my letter, and bring me food."

Betty was delighted to be of service to royalty. Also the idea of camping out appealed to her strongly. "I know a dandy woods, where you could stay, and they'd never find you," she said. "But couldn't John help? He's my brother, and he'd be lots of help watching out."

The King thought a minute and then consented. "But he must promise never to tell anybody until I'm safe home," he stipulated.

Betty agreed gladly. It would be so much more fun with John to share the secret. She felt quite weighted down with so much responsibility all to herself.

The King bought the rest of the candy. Then he

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gave Betty five dollars more to get provisions for the camp. They were all to meet at the old boat on the lake just after dark the next evening. His majesty was to manage to slip away, while everyone was at dinner, and he was to have the letter to the treasury ready for Betty to mail.

Betty trotted home fairly hopping with excitement. She could hardly wait until she got John out into the privacy of the orchard, and after making him "cross his heart and hope to die," she told him all about it. At first John suspected that his sister was playing a joke on him, but finally he was convinced of her sincerity. Then he was almost as excited as she. After Mother was asleep, they lay awake half the night talking in stage whispers across the hall.

The next day the children spent busily building a camp in the woods. John chopped a quantity of branches and built a fine pile ready to be lighted in the evening. Betty gathered a great heap of clean dry leaves, and spread blankets over it to make a bed. It was really quite comfortable when finished, even if it did rustle dreadfully, if you turned over. Then the children turned their attention to the boat. They bailed out as much water as they could, and carefully swept all the spiders out of the cabin, for of course the King wasn't like a prisoner. Betty was for taking the old boards off the window,

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and putting up some neat curtains instead, but the window faced across the water, and John was afraid someone might notice the change from the road on the other side. John drove some large nails into one side of the cabin, and Betty hung up the cooking pans, which she had brought down from home. The children also made a shelf out of some boards, and on this they arranged the food they had bought with the five dollars, and a few dishes. On second thought Betty moved the bed from the bank into one corner of the cabin, in case of rain. Finally they tacked a few bright colored pictures around on the walls, to make the place look home-like. The pictures they had cut from magazines at home, and in the main these represented all sorts of wild animals, with a scattering of cats and dogs. At last they stood back, and regarded their handiwork with satisfaction.

“I guess nobody could build a finer camp than that,” said Betty.

“And they’ll never think of finding him here,” added John.

Mother was very much surprised when the children insisted on going to bed immediately after supper, instead of sitting up until the last possible minute, as usual. On coming up-stairs a few minutes later to kiss them good-night, she was still more surprised to find them in bed so quickly, and

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with the covers drawn up to their necks despite the sultriness of a hot July night. Mother tried to induce Betty to throw her covers over the foot of the bed, but the little girl insisted that she needed them. However she promised to throw them off, if she grew too warm.

Mother would have felt less puzzled over the matter if she could have seen the children slipping out of bed, still fully dressed, after she had gone down-stairs. Both carried their shoes as they stole softly down the back stairs, and out the kitchen door. In the orchard they paused to put on their shoes, and then they hurried away across the fields on the short cut to the woods. They knew they had over three hours free, before Mother would be starting up to bed, and probably look in at them for a good-night peek. They must be home and in bed again by that time, or Mother would ask embarrassing questions, that it would be impossible to answer without betraying his majesty's confidence.

The King was already there, when the children arrived, but he did not say anything about the crime of keeping royalty waiting, for which Betty was thankful. Betty introduced her brother, and his majesty held out his hand in graceful acknowledgment. John shook hands, and then wondered if he should have kissed the King's hand instead.

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But he decided he didn't need to, so long as he was an American.

Betty showed the King the arrangements that had been made for his comfort, and his majesty praised everything highly. But the shelf of food attracted most of his attention. When he told the children that he had not had any supper, John hurried to light the fire, while Betty got down pans and dishes. When the fire began to burn down to embers, the little girl put coffee on to boil. Then she ran out to the far end of the boat, and pulled up the "refrigerator." This was a water-tight box in which she and John were in the habit of putting bottles of grape juice and other delicacies to cool, when they came down fishing. The water was deep, and resting on the bottom of the pond, the "refrigerator" became almost ice cold. It was attached to the end of the boat by a light rope.

From the cold box Betty selected a nice piece of steak, some cold boiled potatoes she had brought from the house, a bottle of cream, and a pat of butter. In a few minutes steak and potatoes were sizzling on the fire. While they browned, the little girl sliced up a saucerful of early peaches. And then dinner was ready. His majesty insisted that the children share the meal with him, and they did so gladly, for they were always hungry.

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“ I wish I could live this way all the time,” said Betty.

“ Me too,” agreed John.

After supper Betty washed up the dishes, using the simple method of sloshing them around in the water from the far end of the boat. Then she dried them and set them back on the shelf. This done, she felt it was time to be starting homeward, though she was loath to leave the fascination of the camp fire, and the unaccustomed mystery of the woods at night. The King gave her the letter for the treasury, and the little girl promised to get a stamp and mail it first thing in the morning. Just as the children were saying good-night, there came a heavy crash of thunder.

They looked up anxiously. Black clouds had swept across the moon, and gathered thick overhead. The air was suddenly still and breathless, as it is before a storm. A fork of lightning flashed across the clouds, and there followed a mighty crash, as if all the bass drums in heaven had been struck a resounding blow.

“ It’s a good thing we moved your bed into the cabin, your majesty,” said Betty. “ You can keep nice and dry there. We’ll have to run now, to get home before the storm breaks.”

But the King did not seem anxious for the chil-

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dren to go. He appeared nervous and distraught. If he had not been a monarch, they would have thought he was afraid. "Suppose I should become ill in the night," he objected. "Electric storms always give me a dreadful headache."

"Well, then," decided his hostess, "you must come home with us. You'd really be more comfortable there, though of course it's not as exciting to live in a real house, when you're escaping. Mother wouldn't tell, I'm sure."

But his majesty would not hear of telling anyone else. "Isn't there an outhouse, where I could keep dry over night?" he asked. "Then I could come back to the camp in the morning."

"There's the barn," said John. "There's nothing in it but a little straw."

"That would do. Royalty has lived in meaner places in an emergency."

"We'll have to hurry," urged Betty anxiously, "or we'll get soaked. John, you help carry the blankets, and lead the way. Your majesty, you hold one end of this blanket so you won't get lost. It's getting awf'ly dark."

The King accepted orders meekly, and trotted along in Betty's wake as fast as he could. The old man could not make as good speed as the sure-footed children, even when they were impeded by the weight of the blankets. He stumbled a great

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many times, and puffed painfully, but he did not complain.

The first sweep of the storm wind was bending the trees, and lashing the grass about their legs, as they panted up through the orchard. The little party headed toward one side, where the small barn stood about a hundred yards back of the house. And then the rain came down like hail. Betty struggled furiously to unlatch the door, and in a moment they were inside.

The barn had been built to accommodate a single horse and carriage, but it had long been disused except as a wood house and was quite clean. Despite its age the building was still water-tight. There was a heap of straw at one side. Betty smoothed it out and laid the blankets over it as a bed. The straw was a bit musty, but it would have to do.

She turned. "We'll have to run in now, your majesty," she said. "Mamma will be shutting the windows against the rain and find we're not in bed. If you want me, just meow like a cat, and I'll come quick's I can. Good-night." And without more ceremony, they dashed for the house.

Fortunately Mother had not yet locked the back door. As the children slipped in, they could hear her slamming the windows in the dining-room. Their footsteps covered by the rolling thunder, the

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youngsters flew up the back stairs, and broke all records yanking off their wet clothes and jumping into their night things. Then Betty had an inspiration. "Hang your things by the window," she hissed, in the best conspirator's manner. "Mamma won't know they didn't get wet that way."

A minute later, when Mother came up to shut the windows, she found both the children apparently sound asleep despite the thunder. She was relieved to observe that they had thrown back all the covers; she had been a little afraid they might have a chill. Betty heard Mother cluck with her tongue regretfully, when she found the wet clothes. Mother closed the window without suspicion, and took the damp things down-stairs, where she could hang them up to dry. When she was gone the little girl chuckled cheerfully. Betty felt that a little necessary deception was all right in this case. She was sure that Mother would feel ever so glad and proud, when she knew how her little girl and boy had helped the King of England. They would all be famous. Betty fell asleep, hugging herself with joy.

CHAPTER XII

A ROYAL CAPTIVE

THE next morning after Mother had started in town to the office, Betty hurried out to the barn, and invited the King to come in the house while she prepared his breakfast. His majesty went upstairs to wash and straighten up before the meal, and John posted himself in the parlor, where he could observe through the windows if anyone turned in from the road, and give warning. The little girl was giving the bacon the last turn, and preparing to drop the eggs into the water to poach, when a knock sounded on the back door.

Betty nearly jumped out of her slippers, she was so surprised, for John had given no signal. She hesitated a moment, and then hurried to the door, wondering who it could be. As she opened the door a few inches, holding it carefully against intrusion, she saw Bobby on the back steps. The little girl was relieved at the sight, for she was sure she could manage him. Betty opened the door a little wider. "How did you come in?" she asked.

"I walked up through the orchard."—So that was how he had missed John. Betty decided that she must watch from the back, too.—Bobby was

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almost breathless from excitement. "Did you hear about it?" he asked.

"No, what?"

"Why, the crazy man that got away from the 'sylum. They're looking for him everywhere. Dan's taking Path-finder to pick up his trail, an' I'm goin' along."

Betty felt a sudden sinking at the heart. It was too bad that all this excitement should come up just when she and John were too busy to join in right away. Not to see Path-finder at work! For the moment kingdoms lost their savor.

"Aren't you coming?" asked Bobby, staring at her gloomy face.

"Can't right away."

The little boy hesitated. Then he straightened manfully. "Well, I'll wait for you, if you won't be so awful long. Can I come in?"

Betty appreciated the sacrifice, but at all costs Bobby must not be permitted to enter. She coughed very hard. "I got a terrible cold," she said. "It's catching if you come inside." Bobby drew back hastily. "Where are they going to start Path-finder?"

"Down near the station. They think maybe he went in town."

"John and I'll be down after a while. You see everything and then you can tell us what we miss."

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"All right," agreed Bobby, cheerfully, as he started off, "but you better hurry. Dan says the bloodhound'll find him in no time."

As Betty turned after fastening the door, she was startled to find the King just behind her. His eyes were wide and staring with fright. "Who was it?" he whispered.

The little girl recovered herself. "It was just a little boy we know. He stopped to tell us about a crazy man, who got away. You needn't be afraid. The crazy man won't come here." She drained the eggs carefully, and flipped them with an expert hand onto the hot buttered toast. "Breakfast's ready, your majesty," she announced, cheerfully.

The King ate a good breakfast, but he was still nervous and fidgety. He started at every sound, and glanced anxiously behind him. After the meal he announced his intention of returning to the camp in the woods. The children agreed that he would be safer there. They promised to mail the letter in the village, and later, to come down to the woods in time to get luncheon.

John and Betty trotted most of the way to the post-office, for they were in a great hurry to be rid of the letter, and go on to the station. The post-master asked Betty where her letter was going, and when she said, "To England," he sold her a five-cent stamp to put on. The little girl licked and

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stuck it hastily, gave the corner of the envelope a thump with her fist to make the stamp secure, poked the letter through the slot, and in a moment was off to the station with John.

Bobby was on the platform, lazily watching a freight train puff by, when the children arrived. "Did he find him?" shouted Betty from afar.

Bobby looked and then shook his head. As the two panted up, "Path-finder didn't even get a sniff," he said disgustedly. "Dan said the rain had washed all the trail away."

The two children appeared keenly disappointed. Betty reflected a minute. Then, "Was he a bad crazy man?" she asked.

Bobby shook his head again. "No, he wasn't even cross. He was just all the time mourning for his wife and his little boy, who died. That was what made him crazy. And he thought everybody wanted to kill him. The people at the 'sylum say they never had any trouble with him before."

Betty pondered upon the strange coincidences in life. The King's wife and son were dead, too, and he thought somebody wanted to kill him. After all, royalties were very like real human beings.

Having nothing special to do 'til lunch time, John and Betty walked home with Bobby. They found Peter Wayland on the porch reading the paper.

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"Is your eye better?" asked Betty politely.

"Quite all right again, thank you," responded Mr. Wayland. Then, turning to his paper again, "They pay a deal too much attention to these royalties. Here in a good American paper is a long account of King George's entertainments in England."

Being hand in glove with royalty, Betty was interested. "What King George?" she asked.

Peter Wayland was surprised at her ignorance. "The King of England, of course."

"But he's not there!" she exclaimed. John kicked her ankle warningly.

"Where else should he be?" asked the minister.

Betty twisted her fingers and made no reply.

"Of course he's there," said Peter Wayland.

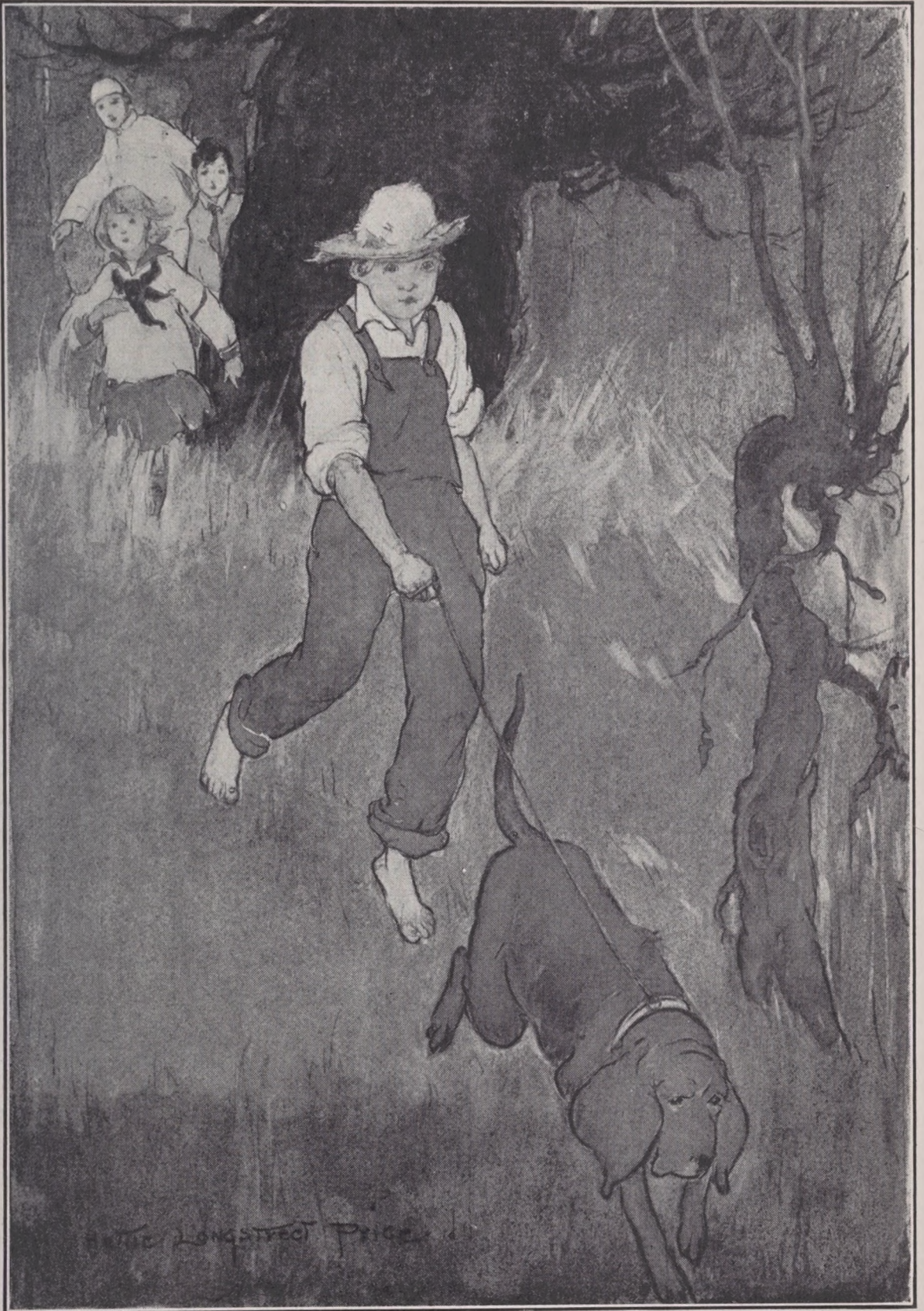
As the children started home, "You nearly gave the whole show away," said John.

Betty flushed. "Well, but he isn't in England," she protested.

"Maybe the papers didn't know. Uncle says they're wrong one half the time and not right the other," commented John sagely.

Betty made no reply, for she had sighted Dan coming in a hurry. He was leading his dog on a rope. "Find anything?" she called.

"Yes," Dan replied excitedly. "Path-finder



PATHFINDER PICKED UP HIS TRAIL IN THE WOODS

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picked up his trail down in the woods. I'm going to get the asylum people. There's fifty dollars reward."

John whistled. "Let's go along," he proposed. And in a moment the three children were trotting after the bigger boy and his dog.

Betty was very much surprised when Dan turned into the palace grounds. She wondered what any asylum people would be doing there. Searching, perhaps. Instead of the proper person's going back with them, the Duke of Gloucester put on a white cap and came along. The little girl grew more and more puzzled.

Path-finder took up the scent in the woods and led the party straight toward the camp. Betty began to be worried over the safety of the King, when suddenly the dog paused, sniffed around a moment, then swung around in a circle, and started straight back. The little girl heaved a sigh of relief. The trail seemed to be just fresh now, for the dog led away eagerly without hesitating. The scent led out of the woods and across the fields. It was only when Path-finder scrambled excitedly over the low rail fence into the Stamfords' own orchard that Betty began to have an inkling of the truth. She stopped abruptly. "John!" she called.

Her brother turned and came back a few steps. "What's the matter?" he asked.

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Betty's eyes were wide with anxiety. "Do you s'pose it's *him*?" she asked.

John caught her meaning. "I don't know. Peter Wayland *said*—— Let's see!"

"Don't go too close," warned Betty with some natural delicacy of feeling. "If it is the K—him, he wouldn't want us to see."

The children peered out from behind an apple tree. Path-finder was sniffing furiously under the stable door. "Here!" ordered the Duke of Gloucester, "you just pull that dog back. We mustn't frighten him." Then he opened the door.

The King appeared on the threshold. He looked calm and serene, with his arms folded across his breast, but he was panting a little. "I've come to take you home, Mr. Brown," said the Duke. "We've been greatly worried about you."

"I was quite safe," replied his ex-majesty. "But straw is not as comfortable as a feather bed."

When they were gone, the children came slowly from behind the tree. "I'm glad he didn't tell about us," said Betty.

"It was nice of him not to," agreed John.

"And let's never, never tell ourselves."

"All right."

Betty reflected deeply. "Well, anyway, I'm glad Dan will get the reward." As usual, she had found the silver lining.

CHAPTER XIII

FARMER MANN

It was a sultry August morning. John and Betty were strolling along the country road not far from home, and in a desultory sort of way they were practicing throwing stones. Most of their spare time was given to this sport, though much of the interest had worn off, since they very seldom failed to hit whatever they aimed at. The unusual thing about the children's appearance was their expression. They were dissatisfied and worried.

The trouble was that the heat and the hard work in town had made Mother ill. She would hardly admit it, but there were shadows under her eyes, she was growing daily more thin and pale, and she was always tired. She was hardly at all like the mother the children were used to; the mother who was always laughing and prancing as if she were no older than themselves. Mother had refused to have a doctor, for she said she could not afford such luxuries. But a few days ago the children had gone forth and firmly summoned the town doctor. They told Mother that she must pay him out of the money they had saved from the candy route.

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There was nearly twenty dollars, which Mother had put in a savings bank for them. She had protested in vain; the children could be exceedingly firm on occasion, and Mother was too tired to combat them.

The doctor had said that Mother must have a complete rest for a couple of weeks, and had prescribed that she eat plenty of fruit and fresh vegetables. He had declared that if she did not do as he ordered, his medicine would be of very little use, and in a short time she would have a complete nervous breakdown, which would mean several months in bed. The difficulty was that neither Mother nor the children saw any way of carrying out the doctor's orders. If Mother stayed home from the office there would be no money to buy food. As it was, there was not enough to obtain the special quantity of fruit and vegetables.

Mother had simply sighed, and said that there was nothing which could be done. But the children were not satisfied with letting the matter go at that. Hence the council being held this morning.

Betty was speaking. "Potatoes aren't really vegetables. And besides, Dr. Gray said Mother had to have green things like salad and tomatoes. The prices they charge for them at Peterson's are simply awful."

John grunted sympathetically.

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The little girl continued her plaint. "And Mother won't eat apples, and she's sick to death of peaches. She wouldn't eat the ones I cut up for her this morning. I wish there were some plums or pears ripe. Seckle pears are good." She licked her lips.

John looked thoughtful. "Mr. Mann has a couple of trees of seckle pears. Maybe they're ripe now. He wouldn't miss just a few off the ground."

Betty's face brightened. "There's no harm in going to look, anyhow," she said.

The children had been to the Manns' farm, which adjoined their own home, a couple of times by invitation, and a great many times without. One of their especial joys was riding the big calves. One person held the calf's head tightly while the other climbed aboard. Then the person holding released the animal, generally being butted flat. Then followed a motion for the rider like a ship on a wild and stormy sea. The calf bounced up in front, and then up behind, with lightning rapidity. At about the sixth bounce the rider flew off, alighting with some force upon the grass, and the calf dashed away triumphant. The next task was to round up the calf again, and repeat the performance with reversed positions.

John and Betty paused at the orchard fence.

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They stared through the openings in the green screen of leaves toward the white farmhouse, some distance away. "I don't see anybody around," said Betty.

"Prob'ly he's off cutting hay. He said he was going to, if it stayed dry," contributed John.

A moment later the two had slipped quietly through the wire fence. "H'rumph!" went something.

Betty nearly jumped out of her shoes. "What was that?" she gasped.

"Just a pig," replied her brother. "He must have turned the drove in here to save the fallen apples and things. I hope there are some pears left."

But there was not one. The ground underneath the pear trees had been swept clean, though plenty of the fruit all ready to ripen with a few hours in the warm sun swung from the green limbs. The children hesitated. It was one thing to pick up some fruit from the ground, which was going to waste anyway, and quite another to help themselves from the tree.

Betty decided the question. "Mother's simply got to have some," she said. "We can't buy any, because everybody's tired of candy, and won't take it. We won't take any for ourselves."

John yielded. "Let's take another look, and

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make sure there's no one watching us," he advised.

The children stole softly up to the fence, which divided the orchard off from the truck patch that lay between the orchard and garden. The two crouched Indian style, and peered carefully over the top rail. Not a soul was in sight. But straight before her nose Betty perceived red ripe tomatoes, fresh green lettuce, beets, a few late radishes, quantities of all kinds of beans, cabbages and corn. Moreover, the whole patch was overgrown shockingly with weeds.

Betty particularly craved some of the tomatoes. "They're all falling on the ground and weedy," she said. "I guess the Manns don't care much about them."

"We might ask for some if anyone were about," replied John, with assumed virtue.

"Well, there isn't, so I think we'd better get a few for Mamma."

"Better wait 'til after we get the pears," advised her brother. "Tomatoes are awful soft, and they'll squash when we climb the tree."

John was just giving Betty the first boost into a seckle-pear tree when a shrill "yipe, yipe," surprised them, and a little black-and-tan terrier came galloping up. "Rat and tan," the children called him, a slim-nosed, nervous little beast, that was

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good for very little except barking and playing, but which was the apple of Mrs. Mann's eye. "Hush up, Sport!" commanded John. "You'll give us away."

"Oh, nobody pays any attention to him," said Betty indifferently. "He's always barking."

So Sport barked in peace, while the children filled their pockets with the ripest pears they could find. A few fell on the ground as the limbs swayed beneath their weight, and several pigs ran over and began to eat them. Sport had a fine idea for a new game. He barked loudly and nipped a hog's hind leg. The clumsy animal ran in fright. The terrier fairly grinned with joy. He dashed at the others, and in a few minutes he had a dozen on the run.

The children dropped out of the pear tree, and, keeping a sharp watch out, they went up to the truck patch for some tomatoes. Betty took off her hat to lay them in. At that moment they heard behind them a shrill yipe of fear. They turned to look. Sport had been having a splendid time chasing the middle-sized pigs, but now he had made a serious mistake. He had started up a litter of fat little squealers, who were still with their mother. The babies were highly satisfactory as they scattered, squeaking loudly, but the old mother sow arose in wrath and went for the little dog. As

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Sport caught sight of her gleaming red eyes and great slavering jaws, he gave a howl of fright and fled.

For so ungainly a creature the sow was astonishingly fast. Still, Sport might have reached the fence in time, if all the other hogs, seeing their little tormentor in flight, had not joined in the chase. The terrier leaped and dodged desperately, for he recognized the menace of the ugly tusks. And with every breath he cried.

“Oh!” said Betty. “They’ll kill him!” And she ran to the rescue, John after her.

There was an old fence which ran part way across the orchard, and had at one time divided it in two. Much of it was still standing, though there were several breaks at one end. Sport was dodging near it; he flashed through, but the pigs on the other side took up the chase, and those on the near side ran up the fence a little way, and began to scramble through a break. The little dog gave a howl of despair as he felt teeth scratch his lithe flank.

A plan of battle had already formed in Betty’s mind. “The fence!” she called to John. And then, “Here, Sport! Here, Sport!”

The children scrambled up on the fence. John steadied himself by clinging to the limb of an apple tree. Betty held his hand and leaned far down

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from the fence top. "Here, Sport! Good boy!" she repeated.

Sport heard. He turned, dodged under a heavy board, frantically wriggled between two snapping sows, hopped over a little pig, made a mad dash, and reached the fence. Betty seized the scruff of his neck, and lifted him clear just in time. A mass of grunting, squealing hogs piled up, where he had been an instant before. Betty heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness!" she said, as she patted the little beast's satiny coat.

Sport, held safely under her arm, was gasping with exhaustion, but he wagged a thank you.

"We're not out of it yet," warned John.

The children recognized that they were in a difficult position. The hogs were thoroughly enraged, and for once had forgotten to be cowardly. They had gathered thick on both sides of the fence. The noses of the largest ones almost touched the children's feet. Betty glanced about wildly for inspiration, and then her gaze fastened upon the tree, to which John was still holding. There were hard green apples in great number; in other words, ammunition. In a few hurried words she explained her plan. Her brother approved, and set to work at once picking the apples nearest him.

Betty set Sport in a crotch of the tree, where he

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crouched, quivering. Then she helped. The barnyard fence was the nearest way of escape, so the children set up a vigorous bombardment of the pigs on that side. Every apple found its mark un- gently, and every mark set up a squeal and ran. Inside of five minutes the children's barrage had driven all the hogs to the other side of the fence.

Then the boy and girl began on that side. Slowly and furiously the enemy retreated toward the fence along the road. "Now!" cried John, with a last hard fling, "run for it!"

Betty seized Sport, they sprang down and dashed for the barnyard fence. Seeing their enemies again in flight, the hogs followed with squeals of rage. The swine ran faster than the children, but the business of scrambling one at a time through the break in the fence delayed them. From the tail of her eye, the little girl saw them coming. She sprang desperately for the lowest bar, pulled herself up, and then, dizzy with relief, she perched on top of the fence, Sport still clutched firmly under her arm. A moment later a pair of strong arms lifted her gently down.

"Well, you be a plucky pair!" said Farmer Mann. "I heard them hogs from the back field, and I knew they were up to some devilment."

"It was Sport," said Betty, holding out the little

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dog. "He chased some baby pigs, and they all went after him and would have killed him, so we had to get him out."

Farmer Mann took the terrier, patted him and set him down. "That was real good of you," he said, gratefully. "It would just about break Mary's heart to lose the little critter. She sets such store by him."

And at this moment the children could have departed gracefully, but for an accident. As John stooped over to pet Sport, a pear fell out of his pocket. Betty strove to distract the farmer's attention. "Oh, I see you've got a new rooster!" she exclaimed.

"No," said Mr. Mann, as he stared at the pear with a curious expression upon his face, "thet's the same old one I've had this long while."

John followed the direction of the farmer's gaze, saw the pear, and blushed. Instinctively he clapped his hand to his pocket; he felt suddenly bulgy with "borrowed" wealth all over.

Mr. Mann looked at the children reflectively, and they shifted from one foot to another uncomfortably under his gaze. "So thet was how you come to be in the orchard," he said.

Betty had to try to defend herself. "There's trees full of them. We didn't think you'd miss just a few, and you weren't around to ask. We

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meant to just pick some up off the ground, but the pigs had eaten those."

John dug down past the pears in his pocket, and discovered two cents. He held them forth proudly. "How many will that pay for?" he asked.

Farmer Mann looked doubtful. He did not think that children ought to be allowed to help themselves to things, and at the same time he did not want to take the little boy's money, particularly since he was Mrs. Stamford's little boy, a lady for whom he felt a profound admiration.

John continued to hold out the two cents, while Betty, who, when brought to the point, fairly luxuriated in confession, disclosed the darkest secret of all. "I was going to take some tomatoes, too," she said. "They're all fallen down and weedy, so I didn't suppose you cared much about them."

"Well, I'll be d-darned!" said Farmer Mann, and he pushed back his straw hat and scratched his head.

"You see, Dr. Gray told Mamma she must eat lots of green vegetables and fruit," explained the little girl.

"And they cost so much in the stores," continued her brother.

"That we couldn't buy them," finished Betty.

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A light spread over the farmer's face. "Is your mother poorly?" he asked.

"She's going to have a nerv—nervous breakup," said Betty, with some pride.

"You mean breakdown," corrected John, wisely.

"Well, what's the difference?" belligerently.

Mr. Mann interrupted the discussion. "Hain't there nothin' can be done?" he asked anxiously.

Betty shook her head. "No, except a vacation, and vegetables and fruit; and we can't manage it."

"Well, now, thet's too bad," said the farmer, sympathetically. "You jest let me think a minute." He took his hat clear off, and rubbed his head hard from front to back. This motion he varied by pulling at his large red ears. The little girl watched the operation with interest. She decided to try it the next time, when she couldn't think of a way out of things, and see if it would assist thought. Finally Mr. Mann clapped the hat on again, and pulled it down so tight that a tuft of his sandy hair stuck straight up through a hole in the crown. "Now, I'll tell you," he began. "Thet there truck patch is right full o' weeds, an' neither Jim nor me has got time to rid 'em out in harvestin' time. If you two will keep the patch cleared out, you c'n have all the vegetables an' fruit you c'n use. There's a plenty."

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The children beamed. "That would be fine!" said John.

"Where's a hoe?" asked Betty.

Farmer Mann chuckled. "The tools is in the wood house," he said. "And there's another thing I thought of. Your place has a sight of fine peach trees."

Betty nodded. "Bunches of them," she agreed.

"Ripe yet?"

"Nearly half of them."

"Well, you pick all you can of them. You'll find baskets you c'n put 'em in in the shed. Don't take no soft ones, jest firm. Come Thursday mornin' I'll take 'em in to market with me, and I shouldn't wonder but they'll fetch a fair price."

Betty smiled. "Thank you ever so much," she said.

But John was thoughtful. "You'll have to charge commission," he said.

"Yes, commission," agreed Betty. She loved long words, though often she hadn't any idea what they meant.

Mr. Mann grinned. "All right," he said.

The children worked hard all day weeding and tying up. Sometimes it took the combined strength of both of them to pull up some large, deep-rooted weed. Betty found the wild sweet potatoes and carrots, with their long tubers, particularly irritat-

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ing. They did not even go home to lunch, but sat down in the patch, and dined off tomatoes and corn. The tomatoes were sweet from the warm sun, and the corn, even when raw, was tender and delicious, since it was fresh from the stalk.

In the afternoon the children picked a "mess" of lima beans and corn for Mrs. Mann, and she lent them a large basket to carry home all they could use. By the time it was late enough to go home and start supper for Mother, nearly a third of the patch was cleared. Both youngsters were tired and grimy, cricks in their backs cried for rest, but broad smiles of satisfaction rested upon their faces as they gazed upon the scene of their endeavors. Farmer Mann had just driven the cultivator in from the fields, and he came over to take a look. His practiced eye dwelt with pleasure upon the neat hills about the corn stalks, and the carefully tied up bean vines and tomato plants.

"Well, you have worked hard," he said in a tone of approval. "Two men wouldn't have done no better."

The youngsters beamed. "You won't know that patch when we get through with it," said John.

Betty squinted at the garden with a calculating eye. "I shouldn't wonder if there'd be a lot of extra truck you could sell after we get it all cleaned up," she said.

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"If there is, we'll go fifty-fifty on it," said Farmer Mann.

Mother was surprised, indeed, when she was presented with fresh corn on the cob, tender lima beans, and tomato salad, all at one meal. When she had been told about the arrangement with the Manns, she could not say enough in praise of the children's ingenuity and industry. They had not explained to her how the plan had originated; it seemed to them unnecessary.

That night was one of dreamless sleep, and in the morning it was extraordinarily hard to wake up. Betty yawned and turned over to take another nap half an hour after her usual rising time. Then all at once she remembered the peaches, and sat straight up in bed. This was Wednesday. Mr. Mann would be calling for them the very next morning, and they must have as many baskets ready for him as possible. "John!" called Betty.

"M-m-m-m," wearily from across the hall.

The little girl felt wonderfully virtuous, because she had wakened first. "John!" she said sharply.

"Are you up yet?"

"H'm, h'm."

"You don't sound up, and we've all those peaches to pick to-day."

A loud groan from John responded. It is a sad fact that John did not like to work.

CHAPTER XIV

BILLY

BETTY was inexorable. Right after breakfast the two went across the fields to the Manns' with their express wagon. They loaded the little cart high with baskets from the shed, and the farmer lent them two bags for peaches, which hung from their shoulders by straps, and two pickers. The pickers consisted of little wire cages with a hole in the top and long claws. These were set on the end of long poles. The claws would pull a peach off without bruising it, and then the fruit would drop a few inches safely into the little cage. The children used the bags to hold the peaches, when they climbed into the trees to reach the fruit higher up.

With many stops for refreshment the children worked nearly all day. In that time they managed to fill ten baskets with fine fruit. All the best peaches were laid in one special basket as they came from the trees. And when the youngsters were through picking, Betty took a few of the inferior peaches from the top of each basket, and finished them off with the large, well-colored, handsome

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fruit instead. This greatly improved the appearance of the outfit. Then first thing in the morning, Betty ran out into the orchard and picked fresh sprays of peach leaves. These she tucked artistically about the blushing fruit.

When Farmer Mann arrived with his wagon, he grinned appreciatively at the artistic effect. "Can't anybody teach you nothin' about toppin'," he said.

That day the weary two rested, except for pulling a few weeds, while they were picking vegetables in the patch for dinner. It was nearly dark when Mr. Mann drove up again. His wagon, heaped up that morning, was quite empty now. The children ran eagerly to meet him. He greeted them with a grin. "Them peaches sold fer more than mine the way you fixed 'em," he said. "I'll take as many more as you c'n pick, when I'm goin' in again next Tuesday." And he counted out fifteen crisp new dollar bills.

Betty gasped. She had never seen so much money at one time in her life before. Even John's eyes were round with surprise. "Did you take out your com-commission?" she asked.

Farmer Mann chuckled. "I reckon it's all right about that," he said. "Giddap, Lady." And the wagon rattled away.

Betty regarded the little wad of greenbacks with

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awe. Then a sudden brightness spread over her face. "Now Mamma can have a vacation," she announced.

John's countenance reflected an equal delight. "Yes, an' they're baskets an' baskets more out there." He stared down toward the dark orchard appreciatively. "It's a reg'lar gold mine," he said.

Mother was ever so surprised and proud when the young financiers came in and laid their wealth, earned all by themselves, before her. "Now you can have a vacation," said Betty.

"And if that isn't enough for a vacation," added John, grandly, "there'll be lots more, when Mr. Mann takes some more peaches to market Tuesday."

Mother flushed and her eyes filled with tears, just as if she ought not to have been very happy. "But, my darlings," she said, "I couldn't think of using any more of your hard-earned money!"

Betty turned very sober. "We'd much rather have a mamma than the money," she said.

"You know we couldn't buy another mamma," finished John, reasonably.

And then Mother gave a little laugh deep down in her throat, that was half a sob, and she hugged the children up very tight. "My precious babies!" said Mother.

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So it was arranged that Mother was to stay home from the office for two weeks and get all well and rested up.

John and Betty spent the rest of that week getting Farmer Mann's truck patch all in order. Sometimes they were so tired of pulling up weeds that they were tempted to let it all go, but always then they thought of Mother, and that made them go at it again. And indeed they both enjoyed the sweet tender vegetables themselves. Particularly the corn and beans. It seemed to the little girl that no meal was quite complete without that delicious combination.

By Saturday night the work was all finished, and Mother, and the whole Mann family, had to gather to admire. Farmer Mann smiled and jingled the change in his pockets. "You're jest born workers," he said appreciatively.

Hired man Jim chuckled. "I see where I'm a-goin' to lose my job," said he.

It was the next week when Farmer Mann began to gather in his hay. The children had come over early to do a little work on the truck patch and pick a few vegetables before the heat of the day. The farmer was just starting out with his hay wagon, that delightfully huge, uncomfortable, rattling contrivance. Generally his daughter Belle, home from her winter teaching, drove it for him, but this

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time she was away visiting. At this moment Mr. Mann caught sight of two pairs of eager, imploring eyes from the truck patch. He smiled. "Wanta come along?" he called.

It was as if St. Peter had said, "Would you like to come to heaven?"—with Mother, of course,—or the confectioner had asked, "Will you eat all the candy and ice-cream you want without paying?" In an instant the children had scrambled over the fence, and were climbing into the high wagon. Betty's hands fairly itched for the lines, and her joy was quite complete when the farmer, who understood children quite as well as any grown-up could, said, "Wanta drive?"

With those slim black straps in her hands, Betty felt as proud as one who guides the destiny of a battleship. "Git along!" said Mr. Mann to the mules, and they got.

The little girl discovered that mules have only two paces, a walk and a gallop. These galloped furiously, and the wagon rattled and swayed. Betty was a little frightened. She had never really driven before, only held the lines while someone else did the guiding. With luck she managed to just shave past the farmyard gate-post into the lane that led through the fields. She heaved a sigh of relief; now all the mules had to do was to follow the lane. But Farmer Mann had not appeared in

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the least perturbed, despite his driver's evident newness to the job. He would have trusted old Dick and Joe to reach the hay-field all by themselves.

The mules turned into the field, slowing to a walk. And as they came opposite the first of the long lines of neatly piled hay, "Whoa!" called Mr. Mann. The mules stopped, and the farmer and his hired man tumbled out.

With their long pitchforks the men speared the hay, and tossed great fragrant bunches of it over the sides into the bottom of the wagon. Here the children trod it down all tight and firm. They thought it great fun to scramble back and forth over the dry clover, and an immense joke if a forkful caught them when they were not looking, and tumbled them over. Then at last, when the wagon was piled up to a mountainous height, what could have been more delightful than riding in from the fields on top of the fragrant mass, and looking down with a half pitying contempt upon all the insignificant little things below their airy perch?

Farmer Mann himself drove the loaded wagon to the barn, while Jim hung on behind. Then Jim swung wide the great doors, and the farmer drove right into the middle of the barn. Here the children climbed off into a haymow, which was on a

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level with them, and then they scrambled down the ladder to play about the barn while the men unloaded the wagon.

John and Betty had never before been free to wander about a really big barn. They found it fascinating, from the long row of cattle pens, where the cows were fed and milked every night and morning, but which were empty now with the exception of one white cow with a very young and wholly adorable little calf, to the warm corner in the hay, where Betty discovered a mother cat and four delightfully playful little kittens. Farmer Mann looked down from the haymow, when he heard the little girl's cry of delight. He smiled. "You jest come round at milkin' time, if you wanta see a sight o' cats," he called. "We ain't troubled much with the rats here," and he vigorously tossed a great forkful of hay into a far corner.

"I'd be glad to come," Betty accepted, gratefully.

The children were especially interested in the line of horses, who stood patiently switching flies in their stalls. There were Lucy, an old mare, who, Mr. Mann assured them, had won the races at the county fair more than once in her youth; Chet, a husky chestnut; Lady, Mrs. Mann's little mare, which she drove to the post-office every morning,

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and to church on Sunday; and Pete, a dark bay with a white star on his forehead, and so wise that he could run the treadmill, which drew water for the farm, or manage the whole place, according to Mr. Mann, in case his master fell ill. The children regarded this prodigy of animal intelligence with deep respect, and offered him a handful of the fresh hay. Pete accepted with pleasure.

It was then that Betty made her great discovery. Just beyond the line of horses was a big, airy box stall. The little girl stood on top of a keg and peeped through the window. It was there that she met Billy for the first time, and there ensued a case of love at first sight. Billy was a colt, two years old, who had never yet been broken, and he was black from his dainty soft nose to the tip of his flowing tail, a blue-black that shone like satin in the sun. "Thet there's one o' old Lucy's colts," said Farmer Mann. "He's too light fer ploughin', so I'm goin' to have him broke to the saddle fer Belle. She's been plaguin' fer a saddle-hoss ever sence her old mare died."

"What's his name?" asked Betty, almost breathless with admiration, for if there was anything that she admired more than yellow cats, it was black horses.

"Billy," replied the farmer.

The colt pricked up his ears and trotted over to

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the window on hearing his name. "He's a beauty," said Betty.

"You bet," affirmed John.

The little girl gave Billy an armful of hay, and he nuzzled her soft hand gratefully before starting to pick over the fragrant mass.

When the children returned to the farm after lunch, Betty came with her pockets stuffed full of sweet apples for Billy. The little colt was delighted, for he loved fruit, and so the friendship between the horse and the child was cemented. After that no visit to Farmer Mann's was complete without a talk with Billy, accompanied by one or more apples, and considering that a day seldom passed without the children's being at the farm, Betty really saw a great deal of the pretty creature.

Haying was finished by the end of the week, and John and Betty were much delighted when Mr. Mann paid off his young assistants with a dollar apiece, declaring that they had fully earned it. Betty stuck her crisp bill into the slot in the top of the little red pig that stood on her bureau. The pig already jingled fatly with an accumulation of pennies, nickels and dimes, and the child felt the bill was a crowning addition. There was a duplicate pig in John's room, but when shaken it was generally sadly silent. Sometimes, in fits of thrift, John would put a nickel or a dime, or once a whole

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quarter, in the slot, but always afterward he repented, and had to spend hours of patient effort coaxing the coin out again. Even the dollar did not enter the pig even temporarily, but was promptly exchanged at the hardware store for a large and complicated jack-knife, which the little boy had long desired. This, he proudly showed his sister, could be used as a knife, a corkscrew, a button-hook, or a nail file, but he failed to explain that the only use he really had for it was as a knife.

After Farmer Mann's invitation, Betty went over regularly every morning at milking time to see the cats fed. It was quite a sight. After all the foaming new milk had been carried into the dairy to cool in great barrels of cold spring water, Mr. Mann would come out carrying three huge pans. These he would set on the ground, and break into them three loaves of stale bread, which he had brought out from the house. Next he would bring out two brimming pails of milk, and fill the pans to the top. Then he would whistle, and from every door and window, from every corner and hole and roof, would come pouring the cats. There were big cats and little cats, fat ones and thin ones, old grandpas and tiny kittens. They were black, white, yellow, gray and brown, and showed every shade and combination that a cat ever

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wore. And every one was scampering as fast as it could go, and meowing at the top of its lungs. The horde would close in about the pans, and then for a time there would be silence, except for the lapping of many tongues, or a low growl if an old Tom thought a foolish youngster was shoving him too hard.

Betty loved to preside over the feast, making more room for a kitten, who was being pushed aside, or restraining a greedy one, who would try to drive his fellows away, and have all the breakfast for himself. There was only one cat who never came to the meal. That was a huge old Maltese named Pepper. Pepper went into the cow shed with the men when milking began, and here he would sit up on his hind legs, open his mouth wide, and wait until Farmer Mann or Jim shot a stream of warm milk into his mouth. He seemed to enjoy this way of getting his breakfast, and Betty thought him very clever.

The cats always knew the day when the butcher came around, for they lined the lane first thing in the morning. And when the first tinkle of his bell sounded down the road, what a meowing there was! Mrs. Mann sometimes thought it was extravagant, but her husband always insisted on the butcher's saving him a quantity of nice scraps for the pussies. "They save my wheat and corn by reddin' out the

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rats; I reckon they earn their vittles," he used to say.

It was butcher day one afternoon when Betty went over to see the Manns. After viewing the pleasing spectacle, which in many ways reminded one of a bargain rush in one of our large department stores, the little girl inquired politely after Billy.

"He's gone," said Farmer Mann.

Betty looked very blank, and then almost ready to cry.

Mr. Mann smiled reassuringly. "He'll be back agin. I jest sent him to the trainer's, bein' as Belle's in a hurry to ride him, and I hain't got the time fer breakin', with the potatoes ready to dig."

CHAPTER XV

BILLY THE OUTCAST

THE little girl missed her friend during the couple of weeks he was away. She really did not see why Farmer Mann had thought breaking was necessary, for she had already ridden Billy about the pasture, when no one was there to see. She hoped that breaking was not what it sounded like. On the afternoon when the little horse was to return, Betty hurried quickly over to the Manns' to bid him welcome. It seemed to her an age since she had patted his sleek sides and cuddled his velvet nose against her cheek.

When Betty arrived at Farmer Mann's there was no one in sight. Dr. Gray's buggy was standing in the lane, and the little girl wondered, with a sudden sinking of the heart, who was ill. She stopped to inquire before going down to the stable to look for her beloved Billy.

Dr. Gray was coming out. "She'll get well," he was saying. "It's a bad break, but it'll heal up with time and patience, and not leave even a limp."

Betty's little head was whirling with breakings. Could it be that there was something wrong with

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Billy? But the doctor had said "she." "What break?" she asked breathlessly.

Dr. Gray turned and smiled benevolently upon her, for she was "that charming Mrs. Stamford's" daughter. "Why," he said, "the vicious little beast threw Miss Belle and broke her leg."

Betty listened aghast. "Not—not Billy?" she gasped.

Mrs. Mann, who had followed into the entry, nodded her head vigorously. "Yes, Billy. He's turned out a thorough bad one. Mr. Mann's called up a calf man, who made a bid for him, once. Haulin' a calf wagon his forty a day on short vittles'll take out the nonsense." Mrs. Mann was naturally a good-hearted soul, but she spoke viciously, for the injury to her precious Belle had made her very angry.

Betty turned miserably toward the stable.

"I wouldn't go down there," Mrs. Mann warned, as she turned to reënter the house. "Jim's attendin' to him with a cowhide."

The little girl paused and shuddered. A whip used on that satiny skin! Poor Billy! Of course, he had done an awful thing, but Betty felt there must be a dreadful mistake somewhere. She could not believe that the little horse had meant to hurt anyone. A sound of stamping came from the stable, and Betty turned aside wretchedly into the

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orchard. Here she filled her pockets with apples from force of habit, and sat down under a tree to think.

So Billy was to be sold to a calf wagon, and she would never see him again. Her eyes filled with tears and overflowed. She would miss him dreadfully. But worst of all, poor Billy would be unhappy. The little girl had seen time and again the miserable bony nags, that trot through the country with a mechanical patience, a lumbering wagon rolling behind generally containing a bawling calf. She knew the poor beasts were beaten, starved and worked nearly to death. The beautiful Billy would soon be handsome no longer, when his poor ribs stuck out like barrel staves under his roughened coat. She sobbed softly, and hunted in her pocket among the apples for her handkerchief.

A long time afterward she saw Jim going up to the house. He whistled with a cheerfulness which Betty felt was very improper on a day of such calamities, and particularly when she supposed that he had just finished the task of whipping poor Billy.

As soon as Jim had disappeared within the kitchen door, Betty was hurrying down to the barn. She pulled open the big door and hastened into the fragrant dimness. Stumbling in her anxiety, she ran to the big box stall, climbed up on the keg,

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and looked in. But the stall was empty, except for a big blue-bottle droning away in a shaft of sunshine. Betty felt a sudden oppression about her heart; she was afraid. "Billy, Billy!" she called in a quavering voice, but there was no answering neigh.

Betty ran all over the stable looking and looking. She even searched in the cow stalls, but there was no Billy. Grimy and tear-stained, she flung herself down on a big pile of hay in despair. Then she had an idea. The pastures! Why hadn't she thought of that before? Quickly she jumped up and ran out of the barn. It was in the farthest back pasture that Betty found a little black horse all by himself. Betty gave a cry of delight and whistled to him, but the horse did not come. The little girl was surprised; perhaps it wasn't Billy after all, though it looked like him.

Betty scrambled over the rail fence and went closer to the animal. This horse was thinner than Billy had been, she saw, and he didn't seem to know her; he only trembled and edged away when she came near. The little girl looked at him carefully. The poor creature's eyes were bloodshot and wild with fear, and then on his flank she saw three great welts. She was sure then. "Poor Billy," she said softly.

Billy's ears pricked up, but he still trembled.

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The little girl felt in her pocket and drew out an apple. "Want an apple, Billy?" she asked.

At the well-known question the little horse whinnied plaintively, but he was afraid to come close enough to take the fruit, so Betty laid the apple on the grass and then stepped back a few feet, so he could come forward and take it.

Billy advanced slowly with hesitating little steps, holding himself ready to jump and run at the first movement on the child's part. The poor creature's faith in human kindness had been so deeply shaken that he had almost forgotten that he and Betty used to be friends.

A step or two from the apple, Billy paused. The little girl was now dangerously close, and he eyed her fearfully. But a delightful odor came to his starving senses from the fruit. After all, perhaps it might be worth a risk. Betty was standing quite still, and that reassured the horse a little. It seemed possible that he might be able to seize the apple before she could hit him, if he were quick.

Slowly Billy bent his knees, and stretched forward his long neck. His nostrils were quivering with eagerness, and his lips were drawn back. Suddenly, with startling speed, his head shot forward, he seized the apple in his mouth, and then sprang erect and backed off to a safe distance with

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his trophy. Here he gobbled the fruit as if he were half starved.

The little girl watched him pityingly. She could hardly believe that this was the same gentle, affectionate creature that had been her loved companion all summer. Something dreadful must surely have happened to change him so. His evident hunger touched her keenly, too.

Gently Betty advanced a few steps. The horse raised his head and watched her nervously. The little girl took another apple from her pocket, and carefully laid it where she had put the first. Then she walked away again.

Billy repeated his first performance, but he came a little more quickly this time, and did not retreat quite so far with his prize.

Encouraged, Betty tried the experiment a third time, with the same result. But, when she held out her last apple on her hand, the little horse would not come near. He eyed the fruit wistfully, but the danger of trying to take it appeared to him too great. Coaxing would not persuade him, so finally Betty laid the apple on the grass, where she had put the others, and walking to the nearest fence, seated herself upon it to consider.

Here, chin cupped in her hands, she thought the situation over. She could see more than a few welts on Billy's satiny coat, and they were evidently

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quite painful, for he kept turning his head and nosing them anxiously. Also he was even thinner than she had thought at first. His ribs showed very plainly when he moved. At last the little girl made up her mind. Her lips shut firmly, and her small chin appeared unusually square. Of course, Billy had been extremely wicked, but she would not let him suffer any more than was really necessary. Swiftly she jumped down from the fence, and set off homeward.

It was not long before she was back again, with a bottle of mixed arnica and a soft rag safely bestowed in her pocket. Under one arm she carried half a dozen ears of corn, which she had slipped out of the feed house, and in her other hand she held a long rope.

Billy whinnied when he caught sight of the yellow corn, but he would not come near to get it. Betty laid the ears of corn in a pile on the ground, and then stepped back a little way, as she had done when she gave him the apples. Billy trotted forward confidently. He was still very hungry, for the fruit had only whetted his appetite. But he did not proceed with the corn quite as he had with the apples. He did not like to take one ear at a time, and leave all the others behind. He felt quite sure that he could eat all six with perfect enjoyment. Billy hesitated, but the little girl was standing very

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still, and really she did not look extremely dangerous. The horse shook his head, snorted, sniffed, looked once more at the quiet child, and then fell to work upon the pile of corn.

Betty smiled. It was what she had been counting on. The little horse crunched away eagerly at the grain. He almost forgot the imminence of danger in his pleasure. Then, slowly and silently, inch by inch, Betty moved sidewise in a circle toward him, until she was far enough behind him so that he could not see her readily. Then she stepped quietly closer, at the same time loosening the noose in one end of the rope she carried.

John and Betty had been spending much of their spare time for half the summer in practicing throwing ropes in western style, ever since Uncle John had shown them how, and told them about his exciting experiences on a ranch. Betty was not so clever at throwing as her brother, for her arms were not so long or muscular as his, but she thought that she should be able to manage so large an object as Billy's head at a distance of ten feet. There was a little danger of his kicking, but she was not much afraid of his reaching her.

Quietly she swung the lasso and let it go. An instant later it alighted over his ears, and as the startled horse jerked up his head, the noose slipped down over his nose and settled about his neck.

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Billy jumped back with a snort of terror, and the rope tightened. Throwing his head about, and whistling with fright, the little horse backed away. Betty was dragged after him, but she kept a tight grasp upon her end of the rope, and dug her heels into the turf to slow him up. The noose tightened with the strain, until Billy could hardly get his breath. Half-way across the pasture the horse finally paused, gasping and puzzled. Betty promptly slackened the rope, though holding herself ready for a fresh tug of war. Billy could breathe more easily now, and he stood still panting and shaking.

The little girl began talking in a soothing tone. "Poor Billy," she said, "did he have a hard time? Betty wouldn't hurt him. Don't you remember Betty?"

The horse eyed her wistfully. There was something familiar about that voice. It brought back vague, happy recollections of a time when everyone was good to him, and he had been a petted darling instead of a beaten outcast. But did he dare trust her? Jim had been his friend once, too, and Jim had whipped him.

And then Betty gave a gentle tug at the rope. "Come, get your corn, Billy," she ordered quietly.

There flashed across the horse's dazed mind a remembrance of the many times he had been led by a

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rope, now to receive food and again for a drink of fresh water. There lay the pile of corn only half eaten, and Betty was trying to lead him to it. A deep-seated instinct of obedience, inherited from centuries of ancestors, stirred in him.

“Come, Billy,” repeated the girl.

And Billy came, at first slowly and hesitatingly, and then, as they neared the corn, more quickly and with greater confidence. Betty walked in front of him at the full length of the rope, and paused only when he reached the corn. Billy sniffed at the grain, started back as if she had offered to hit him, and then regarded the child doubtfully.

“Eat it up, Billy,” she encouraged him.

The horse sniffed again, and then hunger overcame his lingering fear, and he began eating.

Betty stood still for a couple of minutes. And then, inch by inch, she began to draw in the rope, gradually approaching the horse until she stood just beside him. Billy's nervousness showed in his rolling eyes, but he did not try to run away. Then very softly Betty laid her hand on his neck. Billy jumped. The child reached out again, and stroked him gently, and this time the horse submitted, trembling. Presently he grew used to the soothing touch, and began eating again.

Then Betty took from her pocket the arnica and soft rag. Very gently she began applying the

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soothing lotion to his sore spots. Billy winced and looked anxious, but he did not snort or jump away. His confidence in Betty had been gradually restored. He could no longer believe that anyone who treated him so kindly and cared for him so well could mean him harm.

When Betty had finished with the arnica, she corked the bottle up again and returned it to her pocket. Then she stood in front of Billy, took hold of his chin, and made him look straight at her. Her expression was very serious, and she shook her finger at him reproachfully. "Why did you hurt Belle?" she asked.

Billy tried to look down to make sure if the corn was quite gone, but the little girl held him firmly. "Do you know you are a wicked, wicked horse?" she demanded sternly.

Billy's delicate nostrils quivered, and he made a little whimpering sound.

In an instant Betty's sternness had dropped away. She flung her arms about the little beast's neck, and hugged him tight. "Oh, Billy, Billy! How could you!" she cried.

Presently an idea shone like a bit of sunshine through her misty eyes. "Billy," she said, "I don't believe you ever meant to hurt anybody, did you?"

The little horse nuzzled the child's soft cheek.

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Betty accepted his answer. "How would you like to be my pony, 'stead of pulling a calf wagon? There might maybe be enough in the pig."

Billy was perfectly agreeable, so Betty trotted off home quite cheerfully, after untying Billy so that he could graze.

CHAPTER XVI

BETTY AND BILLY

MOST of the evening was required to coax all the elusive coins out of the fat little pig, and then it was some time before Betty was sure she had counted the amount correctly. John was visiting Aunt Bessie in the city, and so was not there to verify the sum as usual. And the little girl had not confided her scheme to Mother. Grown-ups, even the best of them, were so likely to throw cold water upon a plan in the bud. It was much better to bring an affair to a glorious completion before telling about it. After much figuring, with puckered brows, Betty made the sum of all the nickels, dimes and pennies, including the dollar bill, just six dollars and forty-nine cents. She frowned. The pile of coin really looked like more. She wondered if horses were ever sold that cheap. Maybe bad ones were. Anyway, she would try.

The next morning Betty tied the money up in a sugar bag. Then she went out in the garden and picked a big bunch of sweet moss roses for Belle. A few minutes later, she was hurrying across the

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fields. Belle was lying on a big swinging couch on the porch, when the little girl arrived. Belle was nineteen years old, she had taught school a whole year at a little town six miles away, and so she was very grown up. Betty always approached her with awe, partly because she was so old, and partly because she was so "beautiful." For Belle had a face of placid sweetness, with full red lips, and big round eyes soft and brown like a cow's. Betty noticed that the pleasant face was paler than usual this morning.

"Good-morning, Miss Belle," said Betty, as she came up the steps. "I brought you over some flowers," and she held them out.

"Thank you," said Belle, smiling. "They're real sweet," and she sniffed the fragrant moss roses appreciatively.

At that moment a wagon rattled down the lane and out into the road. The little girl turned mechanically to look. With a gasp of horror she recognized the outlines of the well-known calf wagon. But then with a sigh of relief, she saw that Billy was not along. Belle followed the direction of her look. "Father will sell him," she said, "though I asked him not to."

Betty turned her earnest gaze upon Belle. "Billy never meant to hurt you," she said. "He must have been just scared."

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"He acted half crazy," replied the older girl, with a shiver of remembrance.

Farmer Mann appeared around the house. "Wa-al, that's settled," he said, in a tone of satisfaction. Then seeing Betty, "Good-mornin'. How's your folks?"

"Very well, thank you," she replied, politely. Then with an anxious look, "What's settled?"

"I'm sellin' Belle's hoss to Hi Pedrick fer sixty dollars. He's got an errand to town, an' he's stoppin' back fer the hoss afore dinner."

Sixty dollars! Betty turned pale. The little collection in her sugar bag shrank into insignificance before that enormous sum. Of course, when one was arguing with one's brother, one betted millions, sometimes even trillions, in support of one's own opinion, but sixty real dollars! The idea was stupefying.

Betty found her voice faintly. "I only have six dollars and forty-nine cents," she said, holding out the bag, "but you can have all of it, if only you won't sell Billy."

Farmer Mann looked surprised. "But I wouldn't have a hoss like that on the place."

"Well, then, let me buy him," in despair. "I'll—I'll earn the money quick's I can. John'll help."

Mr. Mann shook his head. "I wouldn't think of it. It's bad enough havin' Belle hurt, without

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reskin' your life, too. That hoss has turned out mean, through and through. He ain't fit fer decent folks."

Betty's lips quivered. She felt she was about to disgrace herself by acting babyishly in front of strangers, and so she fled hastily.

Farmer Mann stared after her with a frown. Belle interceded. "She seems to feel real bad about it."

Her father's chin set firmly. "There hain't no use sayin' any more about it." And he stalked into the house.

Betty wandered disconsolately down into the orchard to think it over. She perched on a fence and hid her face in her hands, her elbows braced against her knees; for a few minutes she had no hope. But it was not like the little girl to despair. Presently her mind was working feverishly to find some way out. She lifted her face from her hands, and stared straight ahead intently. Surely there must be something she could do.

In the field across the road were several young heifers. She and John had often ridden them, when they believed themselves unobserved. By association of ideas, her thoughts traveled to the times when she had ridden Billy around the pasture. Would she ever ride him again? And then the brilliant idea came. For an instant it dazzled

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her. That it might be dangerous did not make her hesitate for more than a moment, for Betty was not a timid child.

As the little girl reasoned it, Farmer Mann was angry and wanted to sell Billy, because he believed the horse was bad. He did not think that Belle's getting hurt was just an accident. Now if Betty could prove that Billy was really good and gentle, he might be saved even yet. And she could do it by riding him herself. A moment later Betty had jumped down from the fence, and was filling her pockets with apples. Then she hurried toward the barn.

Betty peeped through the door of the barn, but it was not empty. Jim was there cleaning out the stalls. She would be in plain sight if she took any of the harness hanging up on the great hooks. After all, helping oneself to other people's harness would require an explanation, and the little girl felt that explaining would ruin the whole plan. She walked around to the wagon house. The door stood ajar, and the place was empty, except for a row of boxes, in which were several laying hens. Betty slipped in softly and looked about. The hens eyed her suspiciously but made no noise. The little girl searched through a pile of old harness on top of a bin, and found a bridle, which was worn but still usable. She took also a roll of rope hang-

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ing on a nail, and a heavy blanket from the buggy seat.

Billy looked up and whinnied softly as the little girl approached the gate of his field. He did not appear frightened this time. Betty threw the bridle, blanket and rope over the top rail, and then followed them. Her expression was very serious as she faced the little horse. "Billy," she said soberly, "I'm going to ride you, and you've got to be a good boy."

The little horse snuffed at her pocket enthusiastically.

"That's all very well," said Betty firmly. "You be a good boy first, and then you'll get the apples."

By dint of a bribe of one apple, Betty succeeded in getting the horse to take the bit in his mouth. Then she dropped a second apple on the ground, so that he would lower his head enough to enable her to pull his ears out through the openings at the top of the bridle. Fastening the chin strap was comparatively simple. Next the little girl fastened each end of a length of rope to the bridle ring on each side of the horse's mouth. The rope would have to serve as reins.

Betty had considerable difficulty in getting the blanket up on Billy's back. It was so high for her to reach or throw. But at last she succeeded. As soon as the little horse felt the weight on his back,

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he began to tremble, and a wild look came into his eyes. Betty promptly offered him another apple, and that seemed to reassure him. The little girl knotted two loops, some distance apart, in the remaining piece of rope. Then she tied it about Billy's middle as tight as she could. The rope would help to keep the blanket on, and the loops serve as rude stirrups.

It is true that Betty felt some misgivings as she led Billy over beside the fence, climbed the rails and prepared to mount. The wild look when he had felt the blanket had worried her. She gave him the last apple, and as he chewed it, she spoke to him soothingly. "We'll just take a little walk across the field, before we go down to the house." Then tensely, "And Billy, you must be good! Please!" And she swung herself from the fence onto his back.

Quickly the little girl slipped her feet into the improvised stirrups, gripped hold with her knees, and grasped the rope reins firmly. Billy quivered, and as he tossed up his head, Betty could see the whites of his eyes, as he rolled them in fear. "Steady, Billy," she said, and instinctively braced herself.

The next instant the little horse sprang into the air, and landed with a shock. Then down went his head, and up went his back, and he seemed to be

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trying to bite his tail between his hind legs. Betty clung on desperately. She was afraid to fall off, or in her terror she would have done so gladly. "Don't,—Billy—don't!" she gasped. The rope was holding better than the little girl had hoped. Nevertheless the blanket was slowly slipping. It was impossible to keep a firm seat. But for her practice on the calves, Betty would have flown off at the second bounce. As it was, she clung desperately to the reins and to Billy's mane, and implored him to stand still.

Betty was quite sure she was going to be killed. As she bounced up and down in the air, she had time to view a vivid picture of her own funeral. Everybody was there crowded about the coffin, and they were all desperately sorry. Her grip slackened, she slipped, and all at once Billy stood still, and looked around at her. At last in the midst of his terror, he had recognized her voice. The little girl slid to the ground, and lay there all in a heap, gasping. Billy moved over to her, and nuzzled her hand contritely, but it was a long time before she moved.

At last Betty tried to stand up, but she could not. She just fell back again weakly. She could hardly even lift her hand to pat Billy's soft nose. "I know you didn't mean to," she whispered to him. It seemed so absurd to Betty to lie there on the

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grass, staring up at the blue sky, and not be strong enough to get up. She was quite sure she was not hurt, for she moved all her limbs without pain. It was just that she couldn't stand up. When she tried, a dreadful dizziness made her flop down again.

The sun was high in the heavens, when at last Betty succeeded in rising, still somewhat unsteadily, to her feet. She looped Billy's rein over her arm, and slowly let down the pasture bars leading into the lane. Then she led him once more to the fence, and prepared to mount a second time. Betty was shaky, but not greatly frightened, for she felt that she and the little horse had come to an understanding. As Billy felt the child's weight upon his back again, he quivered and turned to look at her, but he did not jump. The little girl patted his neck gently, and they started at a walk down the lane.

There was no triumph, such as the little girl had foreseen, in that ride down the lane to the farmhouse. Betty was too tired to feel anything very much. There was only a dull aching anxiety, a wonder if her plan was going to work after all. As she rode down past the barn, she met Jim starting toward the pasture with a hitching rope in his hands. Jim gasped; his eyes opened wide, and his mouth dropped slack. "Wa-al, I'll be switched!" he ejaculated, staring.

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Billy started to trot, and the little girl checked him gently. In the lane leading to the road, she saw the calf wagon already returned. The skinny horse had his head down, chewing at the grass eagerly. Farmer Mann and Pedrick the calf man were standing by the porch steps, waiting for Jim's return. Betty's lips quivered, but she rode straight on. And then Billy spied the horse trough, freshly filled with clear cold water. He gave a little whinny, made for it, and plunged his warm nose in with a gurgle of delight.

Mr. Mann looked up at the sound. For an instant he appeared as astonished as Jim had. And then he walked slowly toward them. Betty looked down at him. He saw that the child's face was white and drawn; there were red rings from weeping about her eyes, and down either side of her brief nose rolled two big tears. She spoke in a voice that quavered in spite of herself. "You see—Billy isn't—really mean," she said.

Farmer Mann cleared his throat, and patted Billy's satiny neck. The little horse reached around and nuzzled his master's hand with his soft nose. The farmer flushed and spoke a little huskily. "I'll never send another critter o' mine to them breakers. They plumb ruin a good hoss."

Pedrick strolled up. "That the hoss you're tradin' to me, Hen?" he inquired.

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Farmer Mann turned deliberately, and hung Billy's rein over his arm. Then he gently lifted Betty down to the ground, where she stood a bit uncertainly. At last he spoke. "Wa-al, Hi, I reckon I changed my mind."

Billy was returned to his airy box stall in the barn, whenever he was not roaming the pastures. He did not have to work, for Belle would not be able to ride him for a long time, and he was too light for farm labor. Betty came over to see him every day, and the two were firm friends. John was the only person she ever told about the dreadful experience she had had up in the pasture that first day, and she confided in him only after a solemn promise of secrecy. All the satisfaction that she gave the rest was, "Oh, I just rode him." But Farmer Mann had had a close look at her white face that day, and when she made light of the adventure, he wore a very knowing look, but said nothing.

One good result that her adventure had attained was that Farmer Mann began to trust her like a grown-up about the farm. She helped him hitch and unhitch, drove the horses, kept Billy curried into a state of shining cleanliness, and did just about as she pleased. When Mrs. Mann protested to her husband, he only pulled his short beard and smiled. "That girl has more sense than most any

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two men," he declared. "You needn't to worry, Mary."

Betty was giving the colt a final polish off with the brush one morning, when Mr. Mann stopped at the window of the stall. "That hoss don't get near enough exercise," he said. "Would you like to take him out?"

The little girl flushed with extreme delight. "You—you mean ride him?" she gasped.

The farmer nodded and smiled.

"Oh, I'd love to." Her tone was heartfelt.

"I reckon Belle wouldn't mind your havin' her old saddle," said Mr. Mann, and he showed the little girl how to put it on, and cinch it up. Betty discovered that when she began to pull up the stomach strap, Billy suddenly grew very fat, and she had to wait until he forgot and let out his breath, before she could get the cinch tight enough to hold.

The farmer shortened up the stirrups to the right length, and then he gave the little girl a real riding bridle without the ugly blinders. Billy looked very fine when he was all rigged out, and Betty was immensely proud as she climbed into the saddle.

"I wouldn't ride him very far jest at first," was Mr. Mann's only caution.

Betty nodded gaily, and they set out at a trot.

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"Sets 'er hoss's straight as a little queen," said Jim, looking after her.

The little girl rode Billy home, where she was greeted with vast admiration by her brother John. The children spent the rest of the morning taking turns riding the horse about the neighboring fields, pausing now and again to let him eat grass, or pull an apple from one of the trees in the orchard.

After that Betty took the little horse out every day. First thing in the morning she rode in to the post-office for the mail, racing with the farm boys, who were taking in the milk in their rattling buckboards. The races never lasted long, for Billy flashed by the clumsy teams like a streak of four-footed lightning. Betty delighted in his easy swiftness, and loved to let him out, as much as he enjoyed stretching his slim legs over the flying road. Then one day the little girl discovered an old buggy in the carriage house. John helped her clean it up, and they painted and patched it until the little carriage looked fairly presentable. Then they borrowed an old set of spare harness from Mr. Mann, polished all the buckles and cleaned the straps, and finally they hitched Billy up. At first the rattling wheels of the carriage worried the little horse. He would stop, and look around with a reproachful expression, as if asking why anyone had fastened that young mill behind him. But the

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buggy was light, and Billy soon grew used to the noise.

With the buggy, John and Betty could go about together. And every morning they drove Mother in to the station, and met her again in the evening to bring her home. Also they gratefully did a great many errands for the Manns.

When Billy was out of harness, he followed the little girl around like a big dog. When she stood still, he drooped his head over her shoulder, with a silly, sentimental expression. He was also very fond of nibbling the edges of her collar and cuffs, and was the cause several times of Mother's protesting over their ragged appearance.

A firm friendship also sprang up between Billy and Tommy Tucker, the yellow kitten, now grown sleek and pretty. Tommy evidently regarded the little horse as a foster parent, and followed him all about the place. Billy took great pains not to walk on the kitten, and spent hours washing him with his big tongue. In fact the horse kept Tommy as wet as a muskrat most of the time, but the kitten appeared to enjoy it.

Betty taught the little horse to play tag in the orchard. She would slap him on the flank suddenly, and then run away as fast as she could go, and dodge behind a tree. Billy would chase her, and he soon became quite expert at dodging.

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Presently he would catch her shoulder gently with his lips. Then he would turn about, kick up his heels joyfully, and dash away, glancing back to see if she were chasing him in turn. The little girl could never catch the colt, no matter how hard she tried, so she always gave it up in a short time. Then she would walk away as if she had stopped playing. Billy would come trotting up to find out what was the matter. As soon as he was close enough, she would turn quickly, slap him and run away again. Then they went through the whole performance once more.

The rest of the summer slipped away happily for the children, and the fall set in, introduced by a very light and welcome attack of whooping cough. Neither John nor Betty was really sick. Even the cough amounted to very little, for Mother soaked them inside and out with vaseline, until their complexions turned a dull green. As Betty said, their coughs were so well oiled, there wasn't a wheeze. And the slight illness had the result of inducing Mother to put off sending the children to school for another year, and she gave them lessons at home instead. The youngsters studied them in the morning, after Mother had started for the office, and recited them to her in the evening after supper. Mother noticed that they always knew their work much better on disagreeable wet days, when it was

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not much fun to go out, than on beautiful sunny ones, when the woods and fields seemed to call with voices that the children could not resist.

Betty had, however, one strong cause for anxiety. Farmer Mann wanted to sell Billy. Belle had received so severe a shock in her fall from the little horse's back that she had given up all idea of wanting to ride him. There was no other use which the farmer had for the little colt, and as he explained to Betty, "It was foolishness to have the little critter eatin' his head off, an' doin' no work." Mr. Mann did, however, promise to see that the horse got a good home when he was sold.

Betty found herself very reluctant to part with the little horse. Of course, he wasn't hers, but just the same the child spent many sad hours over the idea of never seeing him again. She even broached the subject to Mother, stating that she thought she could earn back Billy's cost, Farmer Mann having previously promised to let her have the horse at the price he had asked the calf man. But Mother, court of last resort, did not see what could be done.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREAT HORSE RACE

It was two weeks before the big county fair early in October that Dan finally made what appeared to the little girl a possible suggestion. Betty was nibbling absently at a stick of chocolate, and leaning against his candy and papers booth down at the station, when the boy looked up suddenly from an advertisement he had been reading. "Why don't you enter Billy in the free-for-all?" he asked. "Anybody can get in for five dollars, and there's a prize of a hundred for the fellow who wins."

Betty looked up, interested. "What's a free-for-all?" she inquired.

"Why ——" he hesitated. "Oh, it's just a race you can get any horse in, no matter what age he is, and all that. It's mostly the farmers' kids who go in for it. Billy might stand a chance to win."

The little girl's face grew suddenly very bright, and then it darkened again. "But so long as Billy's Mr. Mann's horse, if he won a prize, wouldn't it go to Mr. Mann?"

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Dan looked puzzled and rubbed his nose. Then his brow cleared again. "Not if you'd got an option on him first."

"What's an option?" eagerly.

The boy wrinkled his forehead, and struggled with an explanation. "Well, an option—an option's like that man in Pennsylvania, where we used to live. He paid some money to get a right to buy a farm, an' then he found coal in it. Well, the coal belonged to him, because he had the option."

Betty looked doubtful, but still Dan's suggestion stuck in her head. That night the little girl consulted the red pig a second time in Billy's behalf. This time John was there to assist with the arithmetic, so that counting up was not such a long and doubtful process. The children found that there were just ten dollars and fifty-six cents in the little pig.

The next morning the children hurried over to the Manns'. They caught the farmer just feeding the cats. As soon as all three pans were full of milk, the children spoke in chorus, "We want an option."

"Sufferin' bob cats!" said Farmer Mann. "I hain't deaf. What be you wantin' a option on?"

"Billy!" said Betty.

"Billy!" repeated John.

Mr. Mann smiled. He had little idea that the

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children could really buy the horse. "Wa-al, I don' know ——"

Betty interrupted his drawl firmly. "Would five dollars buy an option for two weeks?" she asked.

The farmer's expression changed. Perhaps there was something in it after all. He knew the children's uncle had money. "I reckon it would," he replied.

Betty began counting out the change from a bag with John's assistance. Presently she looked up from the process. "We'd want it in writing," she said. Once she had heard Uncle John tell Mother to always have everything in writing.

Mr. Mann chuckled. "All right." And he drew a much thumbed note-book from his pocket, tore out a blank leaf, and scribbled on it with a pencil. Then he handed it to the child. "That shows that you've paid five dollars outa sixty on Billy," he said, "an' have two weeks t' finish payin'."

The little girl folded the slip of paper, and made John put it carefully away in the inside pocket of his jacket. Then she handed over the five dollars, and the deal was made.

As the children hurried in to the post-office to change the remaining five into a crisp postal order, they began to have their doubts of the scheme.

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"It's an awful lot of money to risk," John said. "We could both get new skates or a bob sled for that much."

Betty set her lips firmly. "I guess Billy's worth more'n a bob sled."

"Yes, but s'pose he doesn't win?"

"He's got to."

John recognized that there was no use in arguing with feminine psychology. "Well, anyway, I'm going to ride him."

"You are not," positively.

"But jockeys are always boys."

"I don't care. Guess I'm as good as a boy," and she elevated her nose two inches higher in the air.

"Maybe they won't let you enter, when they know you're a girl."

"I'll sign my name E. Stamford. That might be Edward, you know. And when I once get there, I guess there won't anybody stop me."

Betty had the best of the argument, for as it happened, the entering money was hers. Still John kept on complaining on general principles, while trying to think of another good point for his side. But presently his sister turned to him with an air of sweet reason. "What's the use grouching?" she said. "You know I'm the lightest, an'

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Billy goes the best for me." That happened to be the truth, and so it was settled.

A few days later E. Stamford received a receipt for the five dollars' entrance fee, the number 5, and the announcement that the race would start from the judges' stand at 3 P. M. in the afternoon of October tenth. Mother was very busy and tired these days, and the children put off telling her about the race, until finally they didn't tell her at all beforehand. They were in the habit of keeping things from Mother, that might worry her, until after they were all over. Dr. Gray had specially ordered that she must not be bothered about little things. Betty was not quite sure about whether her entering the race was a little thing or not, but she was certain Mother would worry over it, perhaps even prevent it, and so she put off the announcement.

A little before noon on the day of the race, the children put Billy's riding bridle, blanket and saddle on the floor of the buggy. Then they hitched him up to the carriage, after asking Mr. Mann's permission to take the horse out. They drove over to the fair grounds, a little more than a mile away, very slowly, so that Billy might not become tired or winded. Once arrived, they found a hitching post outside the crowd of tents and booths. Here they tied Billy, and unhitched the carriage,

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sliding it back a little way, so that he might not have to support the weight of the shafts. Then they tied the blanket around him so that there might be no chance of the horse's catching cold from the fresh wind that was blowing. Betty looked much surprised at these unusual attentions.

The children had two hours to wait before it was time for their race, so they wandered about the nearest booths, examining everything with eager eyes, and often running back to make sure Billy was all right. They drank two glasses of very pink and flavorless lemonade, though they did not feel it was worth the nickel a glass that they had to pay. And then they bought two bags of peanuts from a vender, in preference to getting ice-cream, because they thought the peanuts would last longer.

In company with a crowd of country folk, the children inspected the largest pumpkin in captivity, and thought what a wonderful Hallowe'en lantern it would make, not to mention the number of pies one could get out of it. Betty figured it would fill at least thirty. They also admired monster potatoes and turnips, each one large enough for a whole meal for their small family. And then above the squawking of prize chickens, they heard a deep-toned grunting. "Hogs," said John. And they were. Betty thought she had never seen such

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huge fat ones. They looked almost like baby hippos.

"I'm glad it wasn't that kind of pigs who chased us that time," she said. "All they'd had to do to that old fence would have been to lean up against it, and over it would have gone."

There were beautiful Holstein and Jersey cattle lined up for inspection, too. The bulls were enormous creatures with horns like buffalo. But Betty fell in love with a beautiful little white cow, with the softest brown eyes in the world. "Maybe, if we win the race, we might buy her too," she suggested. "It would be awf'ly nice to raise our own milk."

But when the little girl had asked the price of the animal, the children turned away abruptly, and walked in silence for quite five minutes. At last John spoke thoughtfully. "Maybe a millionaire might pay five thousand for a cow," he said.

Half an hour before the race, the children returned to Billy, took off his blanket and harness, and then rubbed him off with a cloth they had brought, until he shone like satin. That finished, they saddled and bridled him, making sure that the cinch was firm and tight. John helped Betty tie the big number 5 on her sleeve. The boy was rather glad now that he was not the one responsi-

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ble for riding, and Betty was feeling just a little shaky and frightened, but she tried hard not to show it.

Betty had no difficulties about her costume, for Mother, recognizing her daughter's tomboy tendency, dressed her for every day in a middy blouse, jersey, and wide bloomers, instead of forcing her into the unworkman-like ignominy of "regular girl clothes." As she sat Billy at the entrance to the race track, Betty forcibly turned her glance from John's anxious face, and sought distraction in the contents of the nearest booth. It was full of dolls, dressed in every imaginable way. There were French peasant dolls dressed in wonderfully embroidered red and blue. There were Hallowe'en witches on broomsticks with little black cats stuck on behind. Red-faced farmer dolls in blue overalls, shouldered bright clad gypsies and prim city dolls. And above them all sat a wonderful lady, dressed in shimmering white satin. She had golden curls, wonderful dimples, big brown eyes, and "sure 'nough" eyelashes on lids that would close when you laid her to sleep. Even in her hour of stress, the little girl was conscious of a weak feminine longing for that beautiful doll, but she hid it securely.

At last the race track gate swung open, and then John spoke for the first time. "Maybe you

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better not go," he said, laying his hand on her rein. "You might get hurt. I'll ride him."

But Betty shrugged him aside. "I'm not afraid," she said, trying to speak firmly, and she rode in. Other horses and riders were waiting for the race under sheds along one side of the track, and other steaming horses with little gigs behind them seemed to have just come from racing, and were being rubbed down. Betty had borrowed Belle's riding whip, and she held it firmly in her right hand, and her reins in her left, as she saw the other riders do. A groom approached her. "Kids ain't allowed in here," he said.

"I'm in the race," said Betty with fine disdain, showing her sleeve with the big 5.

The race was called by the starter through a huge megaphone, and Betty trotted her horse toward the line with the rest. The starter stared at her sharply, for she was quite the youngest rider of the lot, but she managed her mount easily, and Billy appeared gentle and well-behaved, so the man said nothing. The little girl pushed Billy into place, and then looked over the other competitors.

The horses in the free-for-all were not regular racers, but long-legged, raw-boned farm horses, ridden by young men and half-grown boys. Evidently the stakes were not high enough to attract

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the professionals. Betty gave a sigh of satisfaction; she had so much the better chance.

The starter was speaking. "A two-mile straight away," he was saying, "four times around the track. Ready, go!" and he fired a little pistol into the air.

At the sound of the gun, Billy gave a great bound of surprise, and then was off down the track like a four-footed bullet himself. Betty nearly fell off, but in a moment she had recovered a firm seat. Then she glanced about, and to her vast surprise, found herself well ahead of the procession. The other horses were not even galloping. And then the little girl began to think. Billy was strong and long-winded, but she doubted if he could gallop full speed for two miles. In a moment she had pulled him down to a swift hard run, that would eat up the miles, without wearying the little beast so quickly. The van of the other racers was catching up now. A long-necked, long-legged gray forged slowly ahead, then a massive, deep-chested bay. It pained Betty to see anything run ahead of Billy. The taunting grin that the second rider gave her added irritation to her hurt, but still she did not try to repass them. She was watching her mount for endurance now, riding him as easily and with as little jolting as she could.

As they rode the track past the sheds, the little

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girl recognized a splash of red sweater with a dark patch above it as John, and waved her hand to him. A shrill shout of encouragement responded. John had not possessed the dollar admission fee, and so, together with other dollarless youths, he had climbed on top of the sheds to view the race.

Betty dropped gradually to fifth place in the van of half a dozen horses, who were running well ahead of the rest. This place she held persistently, speeding Billy up into a lope when necessary in order to retain it. She was gaining confidence now, and her first anxiety subsided. It seemed to her that she was racing, too, with every swift beat of Billy's hoofs. She delighted in his easy grace and endurance. The dappled horse just behind was panting like a steam engine. The dark bay in front stumbled more than once. Billy himself was sweating, and foam flecked his lips and flanks, but his breath came deeply and easily, and he held to his sure stride.

Then the field swept past the judges' stand on the fourth lap, and suddenly the little girl found that she was being left behind. The other riders had let out their mounts, and were driving to win. Betty let her reins go slack, and the little horse broke into a gallop.

The crowd around the track and on the shed tops were cheering wildly now. "Go it, kid!" some-

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body shouted, and Betty straightened in her saddle. It was the first time she had ever failed to resent that epithet.

Billy was galloping full stretch, but still he was losing, slowly but surely. The dappled horse, that he had kept ahead of before, was almost past him. Betty gasped, and bent low in the saddle. Then she reached back with her whip, and flicked Billy's haunch sharply once. The colt had never forgotten Jim's beating. With a snort of terror he leaped forward desperately.

"Get on, Billy!" cried the little girl. "You've got to win! You've got to win!"

Old Lucy's racing blood told now. The colt, thoroughly roused, put forth the best that was in him, and the dappled horse was quickly left behind. Billy's ears lay flat back on his head, his rolling eyes showed the angry whites. A kind of hatred for those puffing beasts about him seemed to obsess the colt. He nipped the flank of the dark bay horse just ahead. The bay, startled, jumped aside and lost a yard. With belly close to earth, and slender legs stretching to the full, Billy forged slowly up. It seemed an age to Betty before the straining bay was safely distanced, yet really it was only a moment.

Half of the last lap was finished. The home run was in sight, and yet there remained three

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racers that the colt must pass or lose. Betty almost despaired. Frantically she urged the little beast to run. And then she sensed a difference. The other horses were almost done; laboring and panting, they were merely holding on until the line was passed. But Billy, with his clean-cut limbs, had found that third wind, that fierce endurance, which comes with racing blood.

With every leap he speeded up. One horse was passed, and neck and neck, he raced for second place. A moment and his panting nose was even with the gray leader's flank.

Betty gasped and prayed. If only he could pass the gray! But the finish was so near! And then the rival jockey saw that black nose creeping up beside him. He struck his mount. The gray broke step and stumbled. A moment, and he gained his stride again, but Billy had come almost even.

A continuous roar of shouting filled Betty's ears; her head turned giddy with excitement; a little blood was running from her nostrils. For a second she hardly knew nor cared who was winning, but in the midst of her dizziness, she still clutched the reins and kept her seat.

Then all at once there was a perfect crash of cheers. Someone clutched at Billy's rein; he reared, and Betty slid off backward into the arms of a big, sunburnt farmer. He steadied her on her



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wobbly feet. "Grit, clear grit!" he said, as he held a brilliant handkerchief to her bleeding nose.

"Won by a nose!" somebody was saying.

Betty struggled to steady her reeling world. "Who—who won?" she managed to gasp through the handkerchief.

"Why, yourself, to be sure," replied the farmer.

The little girl wondered vaguely whose nose had won. She supposed Billy's, since hers was hardly in condition for doing anything just at present, not even breathing. And then a lot of people were shaking hands with her, and a man with a broad, fat face and a kind smile was holding out a wad of yellow-backed bills. Betty took them dazedly. "Better count them," he advised.

She did so, and found there were ten ten-dollar notes. Betty gasped, and then took a fresh grip upon herself. It would not do to show undue excitement even in the face of wealth. "Thank you," she said faintly. Then she thought of John, and she held out one of the bills. "Will you please get me a ticket for John?" she asked. "He didn't have any dollar to get in."

"Who's John?" asked the ring man with a smile.

"Oh, he's my brother; he has on a red sweater on the shed."

The man laughed. "Well, I reckon you can

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both see the rest of the races free of charge," he said, and he handed the little girl two tickets.

Betty accepted the tickets gratefully, and then looked about for Billy. He was being led from the track toward the sheds by a groom. The little girl's nose had stopped bleeding now, and she felt stronger, so with a murmured word of thanks to the farmer for his handkerchief, she hurried after Billy. The groom was the same one who had tried to chase her off the track when she first entered. But now his manner had changed greatly. He touched his cap with respect. "I'll tie 'im up, an' rub 'im down for yer, Miss," he said.

And then a shrill shout sounded from the top of the shed, a cry that the little girl recognized. "That's my sister!" shouted John.

It was the proudest moment of Betty's short life. Then she stretched her neck back to see, and answered. "Oh, John!" she called. "I got two tickets for the races. Com'mon around to the gate, an' bring the spare blanket for Billy."

"Aw right."

As the groom rubbed the sweat from the tired little horse, Betty paused to give him a joyful hug, before she went to join John. Out of sight of the man, she gave the colt one sniff of the precious roll of bills. "You're my boy now," she whispered in his soft ear.

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And then a voice interrupted. A lanky farmer with a gray goatee had stopped beside her. "Give ye three hunderd fer thet there colt," he said, rolling a chew of tobacco to the other side of his mouth.

The little girl stiffened. "Billy isn't for sale."

"Three fifty, then," and he spat placidly.

Betty clenched her hands. "I wouldn't sell him for three million!" she said, and this time she meant three million real dollars.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CIRCUS

JOHN and Betty sat in the grand stand, entranced, while the beautiful racers, wearing a funny harness on their legs that prevented them from breaking out of their trot, dashed around the track, drawing queer little two-wheeled racing gigs behind them. In the pride of ownership, the children felt quite sure that the wonderful Billy could have beaten even the best of these.

The races ended about five o'clock, and the children, having shouted themselves quite hoarse, prepared to go home. They found Billy much refreshed, for he had rested, and had also cleaned up a generous box of oats, which the groom had given him. John climbed into the saddle, and Betty scrambled up behind, and held on by John's waist, while they rode out and down to where they had left the buggy. They began now to feel a sudden anxiety as to whether they should have left the carriage all by itself. But as they approached, they saw it was still in place, and they heaved a sigh of relief.

The pink lemonade man was just packing up to

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go, as the children rode up. "Hi, there!" he hailed them. "Hain't you got the sense t' know thet if you go off an' leave yer wagon in a crowd it'll be stole?"

"Well, it hasn't been," replied Betty with dignity.

"An' a right good reason, too. I've kep' my eye on it the hull afternoon, an' driv off three packs o' boys."

The little girl flushed. "Thank you," she said. And then, though she had no desire for it, "Have you any lemonade left?"

The man shook his head, "All sold." But he appeared mollified.

The children hitched Billy up as quickly as they could, and he stepped out splendidly on the way home, so that it was still early when they reached Farmer Mann's. He was on the way in to supper before milking the cows when they drove into the yard. John pulled up. "Could you wait just a minute?" he called.

Mr. Mann turned. "Jim'll help you put the hoss away."

"It's not that——"

"You know we have an option on Billy 'til tomorrow," Betty interrupted.

"An' we've come to pay it off," John finished triumphantly.

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“Wa-al, I’ll be!” said Farmer Mann, coming down to the step of the carriage.

John took the precious roll from his inside pocket, where Betty had had him place it. He stripped off six tens before the farmer’s astonished eyes, and handed them over. “Five change, please,” he requested firmly.

Mr. Mann grinned, and dug five very crumpled ones out of a worn bill folder in his pocket. John held a whispered consultation with Betty. Then, “I’ll give you ten more for the buggy and harness.”

The farmer demurred. Then, “Well, might’s well. I hain’t no use fer it.”

John handed over another crisp ten. Then he produced the option. Mr. Mann receipted it in full, and added a bill of sale for buggy and harness. Then he chuckled. “Did you get the money outa your uncle?” he asked.

Betty smiled and shook her head. “No. We raced Billy in the free-for-all, and he won.—At the fair, you know,” she added in answer to the blank astonishment on the man’s face.

Farmer Mann’s mouth dropped open, and then he laughed heartily. “Wa-al, that’s sure one on me!” he ejaculated. “You’re smart ones! The next time I’m in a hoss deal, I reckon I’ll have you manage it for me.”

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The children put Billy to bed in their own little barn that night. Betty had spread the single horse stall deep with dry grass and leaves, until she could get the usual straw bedding, and she had bought some corn from Mr. Mann for his supper. She had also arranged with the farmer to deliver a sufficient quantity of hay, corn and oats the next day to last for some time.

The children were late preparing supper that night, but Mother accepted their explanation that they had been to the fair. Still she was puzzled at their air of subdued elation. It was only after the dishes had been cleared away that Betty solemnly spread out on the table three crisp ten-dollar bills.

Mother's eyes opened wide. "Where did you get all that?" she asked.

And then the tale tumbled out so fast that Mother could hardly make head or tail of it for a while. She turned quite pale when Betty told about the race, though it is true that the little girl did not confess about how frightened she had been. Then the crowning touch was a visit to Billy in the stable, headed by John swinging a lantern.

Billy pricked up his ears and whinnied, and Mother patted his nose gently. Then she turned and smiled. "My dears," she said, "when you decide to buy an elephant, or run for the presidency,

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I have no doubt you will succeed, but please let me know beforehand."

"All right," promised Betty.

"Only we won't want all that—for a while," added John.

And so Billy Mann became Billy Stamford over night, and one of the family.

"My country, 'tis of thee-e,
Swee-eet land of libert-ee,"

sang Betty at the top of her voice, as she swung on the limb of a big apple tree near the front porch. She was proud of her voice, a strong clear soprano, and exercised it regularly, Mother's only stipulation being that she do the exercising outdoors. To-day, moreover, the little girl was feeling supremely contented. Things had been going very well financially for the children since the advent of Billy. They had started a mail service for the town, where rural free delivery did not reach, and quite a number of people paid them twenty-five cents a week for the privilege of not having to go to the post-office every day. To the mail delivery they had added errand service, charging ten cents each. Business was increasing every day, and the profits covered the cost of Billy's food, and occasional shoes, and left a comfortable margin over. As Uncle John said, on his latest visit, "If those

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youngsters grow up, and go into business together, Rockefeller will have to look out for his laurels."

"My heart wi-ith rapture thrills,
L-ike that abo-ove,"

finished Betty.

"Do you feel sick?" inquired John, unsympathetically, from where he sat on the grass stringing a home-made bow.

"I'm practicing to be a grand-opera singer," replied the little girl, calmly. She was quite used to her brother's taunts.

"It sounded more like grand uproar," commented Peter Wayland, pausing on his way to the porch. It was Sunday afternoon, so Mother was home.

Betty tossed down a twig scornfully, though she no longer resented Mr. Wayland's visits, since he had been signally defeated in the siege upon Mother's hand and heart. "Is that a joke?" she inquired, coldly.

Peter Wayland avoided the question. "Why do you want to be an opera singer?" he asked.

The little girl put on her best lecturing air. "Well, you see, you have to be a genius or else get married. People don't make fun of old maids, if they're geniuses."

The man's eyes twinkled. "But suppose you fall in love?"

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Betty turned up her brief nose. "Falling in love is silly."

Peter Wayland flushed guiltily.

"No. I'm going to sing, and paint pictures, and write books, and maybe some time I'll be president."

But here John felt it was time to assert himself. "No," he said firmly, "I'll be president."

Betty frowned thoughtfully, and then she yielded. "Well, you can be president, and I'll be vice-president, but you'll have to do as I say."

"History in the making," murmured Peter Wayland, as he proceeded toward the front door.

Betty looked after him suspiciously, but his face was quite grave.

At this moment a loud but discordant whistling distracted Betty's attention. "My Bonnie lies over the water," piped Bobby Wayland, his cheeks distended with effort. And then, perceiving his two chums in their front yard, he made a funnel with his hands and shouted, "Hey! Do you know what?"

"No. What?" replied John.

"The circus is comin'."

John dropped his bow, and Betty slid hastily down out of the tree. "Where?"

Bobby explained. "It isn't here yet. It's just

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comin'. There's a man down-town puttin' up the posters."

"Let's go see," proposed Betty. And a minute later the three children were trotting down-town, kicking up clouds of dust with immense enjoyment.

True enough, down by the schoolhouse a man was pasting up gorgeous posters on an old board fence. The children found it fascinating to watch him, for the pictures all went up in strips. First you got a bit of brilliant green jungle including a lion's tail and one leg. The next strip contained more jungle, and the mighty beast's stomach and other hind leg. Then finally you got his massive snarling head and front legs, completing the fearsome ensemble. Then there were ladies in pink tights, dancing on ropes, more ladies and gentlemen standing upon one leg on the backs of galloping horses. There was a strong man lifting a weight labeled 1,000 pounds, and there was an Indian snake charmer winding enormous serpents around her neck. But the picture that caught and held the little girl's attention was that labeled, "INFANT PRODIGY. See him ride the untamable wild horse of the West!" And there followed a fancy picture of a little boy in sombrero and chaps, astride a bucking broncho with smoking nostrils. The little boy was smiling carelessly and waving one hand.

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Betty sighed enviously. "Some people have all the luck," she muttered. And then she fell thoughtful and silent.

All that week before the circus arrived, Betty was privately occupied in her own back yard. Even her brother was barred out of the great secret, and bribed not to peek. From each session the little girl issued with various bumps and purple bruises, now with a skinned elbow, again with a swollen knee, until Mother became thoroughly alarmed and demanded to know the reason. Then it was discovered that Betty had rigged a tight rope, made of clothes-line, between two trees, and had been trying to learn to walk it. As she explained, "Long's I hold onto something, I can stand on it, even if it does wobble, but soon's I let go I fall off." And she sighed with discouragement.

Mother made Betty promise not to try to walk the tight rope any more. For a day the little girl was very sad, but the morning that the circus arrived the light had returned to her eyes. Early in the day, the children drove over to the fair grounds and watched the men putting up the tents. There were glimpses of fascinating cages, and the roaring of lions. Billy tossed his head, and stamped his dainty hoofs. "Don't be afraid. They can't get you, Billy," his mistress reassured him.

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The pink lemonade and peanut men were already there, selling their wares to the curious country folk who had gathered. Preparations were on for the grand parade before the afternoon show. The children drove Billy into the picnic grounds, where he would not be frightened, and tied him to a tree. Then they went back to join the crowd along the road, waiting for the parade, which was supposed to begin in a few minutes.

At last it came, a red painted wagon carrying a noisy band in front. Then followed prancing horses with gay riders. And great wagons full of beautiful ladies, and drawn by eight enormous horses. And then, in shuffling procession, six huge gray elephants, with gayly painted houses on their backs, and behind them a fat white rhinoceros, who kept making little rushes at the crowd, as if he was cross, and had to be held back by his keeper, who carried a heavy knotted club. And then there were the cages, with glaring lions, a vividly striped tiger, who pretended to be asleep, a black bear, and a couple of hyenas, who chattered their teeth suggestively. Finally there came a big brown camel, two cunning little zebras, and four white mules, who were pulling a big wagon in which some funny clowns were turning somersaults and standing on their heads.

Betty gave a sigh of perfect bliss, and then re-

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membered. "I wonder where's the Infant Prodigy?" she said.

"Don't know. Let's follow them," said John.

The children got Billy, and drove along behind the clowns, as pleased as if they were the whole circus. A clown with a funny red nose pretended to fall over backward, and he landed right on Billy's back. Billy was so surprised he hopped right into the air, and nearly upset the buggy. "Beg your pardon," squeaked the clown. And he stood up on Billy, and hopped back into the wagon again. The crowd laughed very loudly, but John drove a little farther back of the clowns after that.

Down by the post-office, the children met Bobby. He climbed into the buggy with them, and sat on the floor. "Isn't it great?" he said.

"You bet!" agreed John.

But Betty was silent in thought. Presently she became aware of what Bobby was saying. "I've got to earn my ticket to the circus," he said. "I thought it was comin' yesterday, an' I played hooky from school, so Peter won't give me the money."

The little girl's thrifty side was aroused. "Let's all earn our tickets. How much are they?"

"Fifty cents."

"Well, we could carry water for the elephants.

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The boys in books all do. Or ——” and she was silent again.

“Or what?” urged John.

“Well, it’s just an idea. I don’t know if it’d work. But you know how ticklish Billy is. It’s his third rib. If you scratch it, he nearly jumps out of his skin. Well, I thought if we called him a western broncho—he might be, by descent, you know—and if the Infant Prodigy isn’t here, maybe they might let me dress up and ride instead. I guess I could stick.”

Bobby’s eyes bulged. “You’d never dare!”

“Wouldn’t I just! I guess it’d be worth three tickets.”

“You might get hurt,” objected John, seriously.

“Billy wouldn’t hurt me.”

“Well, maybe the Infant Prodigy’s here, so they wouldn’t want you.”

“We’ll see.”

CHAPTER XIX

FAME

At the fair grounds the children tied Billy up again, and then proceeded to hunt a task whereby they might earn their tickets to the afternoon show. But there seemed to be about a hundred farm boys all eager to carry water and run errands. When Bobby, with the idea of being helpful, proceeded to offer armfuls of hay from a pile to the elephants, he was promptly chased out. The workmen did not want to be bothered with children. So Betty, as a last resort, decided to try her great plan.

Near one of the side show tents were gathered some of the clowns who had ridden in the big wagon. They seemed to have nothing much to do, so Betty approached them with her question. "Do you know where the manager is?" she asked a little nervously.

The clowns all grinned. "I'm the manager," replied the one who had jumped on Billy, only he spoke now in a deep bass tone instead of a squeak.

Betty tried not to look surprised. "Well, I—we wanted to know if the Infant Prodigy is going

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to ride the broncho this afternoon. We didn't see him in the parade."

"He's got the mumps," replied the clown, starting on bass and ending with a squeak.

"Oh, good! I—I mean I'm very sorry, but I've got a—a broncho. He jumps and bucks and everything just like a real one, if I tickle him. And if I was all dressed up and everything, they'd never know the difference. And all I'd want would be three tickets." She finished a little breathless.

The clowns all laughed very loud, and Betty turned red. "Billy does make a good broncho," she insisted. "If you'll lend me a saddle and bridle, I'll show you."

"I'll take you," said the clown with the squeak and bass. And explaining, "You can try it."

The children ran and got Billy quickly. When they returned a few minutes later, they found the clowns had got out a huge inlaid saddle, a bridle covered with bangles, and even a pair of trousers with wonderful furry chaps, a red neckerchief and a sombrero. They were all chuckling as if it was a huge joke. Billy did not like the appearance of the clowns, but John held him tight, while the men saddled him. Betty pulled the trousers on over her clothes, tied the red neckerchief, and clapped on the sombrero at a rakish angle. A clown helped

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her to mount. The little girl set her toes firm in the stirrups, and gathered the heavy reins up short.

"Now look out for his heels," she warned. And she rubbed the little horse with her heel in the third rib.

Billy snorted and jumped into the air. When he landed, he pawed the ground angrily. The little girl tickled him again. This was past a joke, and he began to bounce around like a rubber ball. When Betty was out of breath, she pulled Billy in and quieted him. Then she rode up to the clown. "Isn't he good?" she asked, proudly.

"Pretty good ridin', sis," admitted the clown, squeakily. "You're clever for a young 'un."

Betty flushed with pleasure.

Just then a voice shouted hoarsely from the side of the big tent, and all but the squeaky clown started for it hurriedly. "Wait here a minute," he said. "Performance startin'. I'll be back."

"How about the three tickets?" asked Betty anxiously.

The clown reached inside his costume to his pocket, hauled out some change, and counted out a dollar and a half. "I reckon you earned it." The voice shouted again. "You wait here," called back the clown as he hurried away. "Be back in a minute."

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Betty gave John and Bobby each fifty cents, carefully pinning her own share into her breast pocket. "I'll come in after I've done my stunt," she promised.

The little boys hurried away to the big tent, and Betty waited. Five, ten, fifteen minutes went by, and the little girl lost patience. She was missing the show. The manager must have forgotten her. Of course, she might have tied Billy up, bought a ticket, and gone right in, but Betty was an honest child. Presently she rode over to the rear entrance of the big tent. The guard was off duty, and she and Billy went right in. The grand procession was just coming off, and everyone was dashing about, getting ready for the first act. No one paid any attention to the child. The little girl pulled Billy to one side, out of the way of the elephants just coming off. Billy snorted and trembled, but he behaved himself. He seemed dazed by the rush, noise and color of it all.

Betty rode close to the entrance to the ring. She could see beautiful ladies in ballet skirts, covered with spangles, dancing on the backs of satiny-skinned white horses, as they galloped around the ring. In the centre stood a man in a tall silk hat, snapping a long black whip. Each time he snapped the whip, the ladies would turn about, hop into the air, or change horses, each one jumping

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upon the mount behind her. Nervous, the little girl put them down.

And then some clowns stepped to the side of the track, each holding some big hoops covered with gay-colored tissue paper. Among them Betty recognized the clown with the squeaky voice. The clowns held the hoops up, and the ladies jumped right through the paper, landing upon their horses again each time very prettily. The audience clapped and shouted, and Betty clapped, too. Presently the ladies came galloping out, and the little girl drove Billy farther forward to give the ladies room to pass.

The squeaky clown saw the little girl now and recognized her. He waved at her wildly. Betty accepted his gestures as her signal to come on. She clamped her knees tight on the saddle, and clucked to Billy. He cantered forward. The band struck up a lively tune, and Billy went into action. In the first minute Betty thanked heaven the saddle was deep. She could never have stuck in her old shallow one. The little girl had not touched the colt's ribs; but there was no need. The shouting, the band, the excitement were enough. The little horse surpassed himself. He kicked, he bucked, he bounded into the air. Now he stood on his hind feet, now on his front ones. Out of the corner of her eye Betty saw the squeaky clown holding

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a hasty consultation with the man in the silk hat.

On the grand stand sat Mrs. Patterson, the "beetle lady," as Betty called her. She had taken her Sunday School class to the circus, so that they might see the performance with the benefit of a "moral influence" to guide them. "I do hope the little boy won't fall off," she said.

And then the rider's hat blew off, and the little girl's fair curls fell about her shoulders. "Betty Stamford!" screamed Mrs. Patterson, in horror.

A moment later a clown had seized the kicking horse's reins, and was dragging him out. On the grass outside the big tent, they lifted Betty down out of the saddle. The man with the silk hat had followed out. "What's all this nonsense?" he shouted.

The squeaky clown looked foolish.

"Didn't I—ride—him?" demanded Betty, still gasping.

"It was all a mistake," said the squeaky clown humbly, in quite an ordinary tone of voice.

"You have any more mistakes like that, Joe," bellowed the man with the silk hat, "and I'll fire you. You see after that kid now, 'til she's fit to go home." And he strode back into the tent.

"Wanta sit down?" asked Joe meekly.

"I couldn't sit down, except on the front

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of me," replied Betty. "What made him so angry?"

"He's the manager. I was only joking you before. I didn't mean for you really to go on."

Betty thought a minute. "Well, didn't I do all right?"

"You did fine, kid. You'll maybe make a great rider some day. But there was an old hen up in the grand stand recognized you, and was screaming fit to split. I expect there'll be a row."

Betty looked anxious. "I expect I'd better go home."

Joe smiled. "I reckon there's no rush. I'll stand treat to some lemonade and pop-corn, after you git them fancy duds off, and then we'll hitch up the broncho, an' you c'n be all ready to start when them boys o' yours comes out."

The little girl enjoyed her treat with the clown very much. The only disappointing thing about it was that the clown was very discouraging about chances for advancement in a circus. He evidently regarded it as no suitable profession for an ambitious man. And Betty, who had been seriously considering offering to join, changed her mind. Perhaps her other ambitions would suffice after all, without adding that of becoming a circus rider.

When Betty was comfortably full of pop-corn and lemonade, the clown hitched Billy up to the

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buggy, and tied him to a tree. Then, with many expressions of esteem, he left the little girl, and went back to the big tent to finish his act. Betty would have liked to go in to see the rest of the performance, but the clown had explained that there was only half an hour left—hardly fifty cents' worth—and, besides, Betty felt an inward shrinking from coming under Mrs. Patterson's shocked eyes. So the little girl untied Billy, and made an extra cushion for the buggy seat with his blanket. Then she drove out to the road, and sat waiting, patiently holding the lines, until John and Bobby should come out.

At last, with a final blare of the band, the performance closed, and the people came streaming out. The two boys were among the first. Betty whistled, and they started toward her. Then Mrs. Patterson's high voice shrilled out, "Betty Stamford!"

"Get in quick!" hissed the little girl. "Giddap, Billy!"

The boys tumbled in, and Billy cantered swiftly down the road. For a time silence prevailed, except for the thudety thud of Billy's feet. It was the awestruck silence that accompanies one condemned. At last John cleared his throat. "I s'pose she'll make a row."

Betty nodded glumly.

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That was all that was said, until Betty stopped the buggy in front of Peter Wayland's, and Bobby climbed out. "Good-bye," said Bobby, in the tone of one who bids a last farewell.

The little girl slapped Billy with the lines, and rattled off up the road.

When the children reached home, they unhitched the horse, and put him away in the barn quickly. Then they hurried into the house, and started getting everything ready for Mother. Like other people with bad consciences, they were careful to have everything especially nice. Betty cooked some cauliflower with cream dressing, because she knew it was Mother's favorite vegetable. And when Mother reached home, supper was already on the table, steaming hot. Mother was much pleased with the cauliflower. The children did not tell her right away what had happened. As Betty said, what was the use in spoiling her supper?

After supper, John and Betty cleared up quickly without a grumble. When they were quite through, they went into the parlor, where Mother was reading the paper. John fidgeted with the leaves of a book, and Betty carefully rearranged a vase on the mantel. At last the little girl spoke. "Mamma," she said.

"Well, dear?"

"There was something happened to-day."

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"Yes?" And Mother laid down her paper.

"'Twasn't much," contributed John, gruffly.

"To make such a fuss over," finished his sister.

Mother looked puzzled.

"You see, we just ——" And then the door-bell rang. Betty paused abruptly, and the two children cast frightened glances toward the hall. Then with one accord they bolted through the dining-room to the kitchen, and out the back door.

Mother was very much surprised and rather worried by their odd behavior. What could they have been up to? She answered the now frantically ringing bell herself, and admitted a stern-visaged Mrs. Patterson. Altogether, Mother was rather relieved than otherwise by the Sunday School teacher's tale, despite its luridness. She had feared—well, she had not quite known what she had feared—but it had been something terrible.

When Mrs. Patterson had at last gone after fully relieving her mind, Betty came slowly in from the barn. Much to the little girl's surprise, Mother did not punish her, but just hugged her up close, as if she was glad to have her safe home, and no bones broken. And then Mother spoke very seriously about the dreadful risks Betty had taken, and made her promise never to do so again. And when Mother spoke about how terribly they would all feel if Betty had been killed doing that rash and

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foolish thing, the little girl cried, and John sniffed a bit, and then pretended he hadn't.

It was a much subdued Betty who drove in town for the mail the next morning, and hitched Billy in front of the post-office. She had not raced with a wagon once all the way in. Three or four little boys were playing marbles on the sidewalk. They looked up. "That's her," said one excitedly. "That's the girl what rode the broncho in the circus. Gee, but he bucked! Her name's Betty."

"How do you know?" asked another little boy, jealously.

"I was there, an' Mrs. Patterson, she said so. An' Betty lives here."

"Gee!"

Betty had straightened perceptibly, and her nose had risen at least two inches higher in the air, as she started into the post-office. It was her first taste of fame.

CHAPTER XX

BETTY DECIDES TO BE A FAMOUS AUTHOR

BETTY scuffed up the dry leaves and frowned discontentedly.

"What's the matter?" asked John, who was whittling a whistle out of a piece of stick.

"I want to be famous," replied his sister.

The boy paused in surprise. "What for?"

"Why, Peter says that everybody who amounts to anything is ambitious. An' if you're ambitious, then you have to get to be famous. I think I'll be a famous author."

John sniffed impolitely. "Yes, you will," sarcastically.

"You know I can tell nice stories, so why can't I write them?"

The boy looked doubtful. "Maybe. I like your stories all right," generously, "but I wouldn't pay any money for them."

Betty's blue eyes sparkled angrily. "All right for you! I won't tell you any more stories. I'll just write them all, 'n' make a million dollars. So there!"

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Betty was as good as her word. She hunted up a quantity of scrap paper, sharpened two stubby pencils with care, and sat down at Mother's desk to prove her abilities to a doubting world.

The little girl thought deeply. A good story ought to be exciting, quick-moving and unusual. Should she write a novel to begin with, or just a children's story? Finally, she decided that a children's tale would be easier to start with. She could try a novel afterward.

Betty nibbled her pencil. The first thing was choosing her characters. Animal stories were always interesting, so the young author decided to include her favorite, a Bengal tiger. Then, of course, there had to be a hero, a heroine and a difficult situation, which the hero gallantly overcomes, at great risk to himself.

After long thought the great idea came. The little girl's eyes lighted, she set her lips determinedly, and proceeded to write with some difficulty, in a round but straggling hand, the following title:

"Ben Kemp and the Bengal Tiger."

Ben Kemp was a newsboy, twelve years old, who lived in a tenement with his invalid mother. Ben sold papers, and his mother sewed, but together they had not saved enough to pay the rent.

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At the end of the day, the despairing Ben came upon a poster:

"NOTICE

BIGGEST AND SAVAGEST BENGAL TIGER ESCAPED
FROM BARNUM AND BAILEY CIRKUS.
\$25 REWARD FOR INFORMATION."

Of course, Ben, like all dauntless heroes, proceeded to hunt for the tiger, instead of running home as fast as he could go, like most mere boys. And at last the newsboy found the ferocious beast stalking the heroine, a rich little girl in fancy clothes, who was running down the street in happy innocence, to buy oranges from a vender.

"Suddenly a terrible thing happened." Betty was so excited as she approached the climax, that she could hardly write legibly, or fast enough. "With a blood-curdling cry the tiger sprang upon the defenseless child, bearing her to the ground, and was about to crush her head in his mouth when Ben gave a shout, and without stopping to think a single second, he jumped on the tiger's back, lifted up his little fist, and hit the tiger on the head with all his might."

The authoress gasped excitedly, and then proceeded with the thrilling scene of the tiger's capture, after he had stunned Ben with a blow of his paw. Of course, the newsboy's heroic act had dis-

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tracted the beast's attention from his first victim, and saved her from injury.

Hero and heroine were taken to the rich little girl's home, and Mrs. Kemp sent for. Meanwhile, a doctor examined Ben, and found "he wasn't hurt, only two ribs broken, and a little bruised."

Upon Mrs. Kemp's arrival, the door was immediately opened by a liveried servant. "Are you Mrs. Kemp?" the servant asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Will you please step into the parlor a minute?"

"Yes, I will."

As she entered the room who should rise from one of the deep-cushioned chairs but the little girl's mother, Mrs. Barton. Mrs. Barton started forward to shake hands with Mrs. Kemp when suddenly she stopped, and stared at Mrs. Kemp, who stared back. Finally Mrs. Kemp said doubtfully, "Hilda?"

"Bessie?" said Mrs. Barton, also doubtingly.

Then they clasped each other in an embrace, each murmuring, "Sister!"

Betty leaned back, deeply touched by the final pathetic scene. Then slowly, the pride of accomplishment came to the young authoress. She gazed with awe upon the written page. It had been granted her to create a story, a bit of immortal lit-

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erature. It would be a long time before the child would learn that, in nine cases out of ten, a manuscript is still only a piece of paper.

The little girl adjusted the pages in the right order, with tender respect. Then she had another bright idea. The news of her glorious success should burst upon the family all at once. Quickly, she selected a large envelope, and addressed it to the editor of a juvenile magazine, carefully adding, "Grown-up Editor." So precocious a genius as herself was not entering the children's contest.

Betty had grown a little weary after her efforts, but she forced herself to write a careful letter to accompany the story. Christmas was drawing near, and the little girl explained that she would like to have the money for her tale in time for that occasion. She thought five dollars would be enough. The letter closed politely, and Betty signed her full name. For a moment she observed the signature with a faint dissatisfaction. Then she carefully added, "Authoress."

CHAPTER XXI

AN UNAPPRECIATED GENIUS

THE days could not pass fast enough for Betty, while she was waiting for the answer to her letter. Already she was planning what she would do with the expected check. But the money did not seem so important to her as the signal triumph that her success would mean. How proud and pleased Mother would be! And John would have to apologize for his impolite remarks.

When the letter did come at last, it was not the little girl who received it after all. Mother had a holiday, and had kept Betty home to try on a new dress, so that John had gone by himself for the mail. Neither John nor his mother noticed that the bulky envelope, mixed with the papers and ordinary letters, was addressed to Miss instead of Mrs. Elizabeth Stamford.

Mother supposed that the letter from the magazine contained advertising. She opened it out of respect for an excellent magazine, and was astonished to find an encouraging letter to an unknown author. The reply had been compiled by an editor

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whose kindness exceeded even his sense of humor. Mother glanced back at the name, and then she smiled proudly. Why, it must be Betty who had received this nice letter. An encouraging refusal was a good deal for a little girl of ten.

Interestedly, Mother turned to the story. Her eyes widened at the title, but she began the story with an attempt at serious interest. Presently her lips twitched helplessly, she chuckled, she laughed. At this point Peter Wayland arrived, and Mother handed him the tale, without a thought of hurting Betty's feelings.

When the young authoress appeared presently, Peter's face was red, and he was uttering shouts of glee. In one horrified instant Betty recognized her manuscript. They were laughing at her! Mother was chuckling too. The little girl turned to flee, but Peter saw her.

"Come here, Betty," he called. "This is a great story."

The child approached, suspiciously.

"Now this Ben Kemp is what I call a real hero," said Peter, heartily. "Doesn't mind a little thing like thumping a tiger on the head." He chortled mischievously. "And that last touch—making them sisters—that's genius."

Betty reddened slowly, and her eyes flashed. Suddenly, she stepped forward, seized the papers,

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and sprang back with them. She scowled at the young man. "I think you're horrid, horrid, horrid!" she cried, and fled swiftly, not heeding Mother's shocked, "Why, Betty!"

Down through the orchard, and across the fields the child ran, battling with rage and disappointment. It was cruel to have failed, but worse to be laughed at. Giddy, childish castles in the air crashed to earth, and the little girl tried to run away from the havoc. In a far corner of the woods Betty finally paused to rest. Seated on a fallen tree trunk, she read her letter, and reviewed the situation solemnly.

Peter's laughter had opened the little girl's eyes. She was not deceived by the kind letter. She knew very well that "Ben Kemp" was a failure. But with Betty disappointment was a tonic. She was far from discouraged. On the contrary, she arrived at a settled determination to succeed in such a fashion that everyone would be sorry for having laughed at her. The child began to realize that success meant hard work and failures to start with, but she was not dismayed.

Betty never harbored resentment for a personal injury very long, so that she took Mother's rebuke for her display of temper meekly when she arrived home. And Peter made his peace easily the next day with a box of candy. But John found that

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there was a spice of danger in whispering, "Ben Kemp," or growling suggestively.

The budding authoress now performed all her work in the privacy of the stable, hiding the results in an old feed bin until completed. She confided in no one but Billy and Tommy Tucker. These two could not give her away.

Like most young authors, Betty sought after realism, and all the stories were sad. There was the tale of the romantic young Southerner, who went to war, and died on the battle-field, because the girl of his heart married his younger brother. There was also a first attempt at a poem, which recounted the hazardous adventures of three small kittens, set adrift in a rowboat. Probably this was one of the earliest samples of very free verse. A melancholy tune Mother was fond of playing on her violin inspired "Nicodemus." This was a tale of the Civil War. Of course, the hero died gloriously, and the moon came out, and gazed down upon his still form in mournful grandeur. There was a refrain, pronounced in sad and dropping accents:

"Nicodemus!

Nicodemus!

Nicodemus!"

Betty particularly enjoyed reciting this poem, and Billy's polite attention was all that could be

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desired. Tommy Tucker, however, was not so decorous in the presence of literary genius. He insisted upon chasing his tail at the saddest moments, patting Betty's pencil, when that instrument was in action, prancing back and forth across the paper, leaving his own comments, in the shape of little footprints, and in other ways showing his scorn for all serious matters.

The young author took great pleasure in her own efforts. She had been telling John stories for a long time. This was like telling them to herself in her own way. John often insisted upon changes, particularly if the hero was having too hard a time of it. Moreover, she saw now a prospect of glittering fame some day. And in the meantime, she spent many pleasant hours in a world of dreams and impossible things come true.

It was a brisk Saturday afternoon in the late fall, when Betty had been across the fields to visit Mrs. Mann. The farmer's wife regaled her with fresh cookies and milk. The cookies were really delicious. They had conversed sedately about chickens, and the prospects for winter wheat, and discussed the new clothes, which Mrs. Mann's sister had just purchased in the city. The little girl was returning in a very cheerful frame of mind, when she met John down in the orchard. The boy grinned with all the natural, masculine love of teas-

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ing, and chanted softly, "Nicodemus, Nicodemus, Nicodemus!"

Betty gasped, and her brother dodged expectantly. But the attack did not come yet. The young authoress flew to the barn, and searched excitedly in the feed-bin, where her treasures of thought had been concealed. They were gone. Swiftly, she darted out the door again. "John! Where did you put them?"

"Put what?" innocently.

"You know very well," with rising rage.

"Nicodemus?"

"Oh, I could shake you! Where did you put my stories and poems?"

"Is that what they were?" with well-simulated surprise.

There ensued an exciting chase through the orchard and around the barn. It was lucky for John that he could run faster than his sister. As it was, he was hard put to it to keep ahead at times, especially as he wasted breath on occasional giggles. It was seldom that he could successfully tease Betty, and he was reluctant to cease so pleasant an amusement. Finally, the chase led around to the house, in the back door, noisily through the hall, and into the parlor.

"Help, help!" shouted John in mock terror, as he dashed behind Mother's chair.

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"Mercy, children!" said Mother. "What are you doing?"

"He—took my stories," cried Betty, gasping with rage and weariness.

"John shouldn't have done so without asking you first, dear," declared Mother. "But they're all right here," indicating a little pile of papers on the table. "He showed them to me, and I think they're very good."

The authoress paused in surprise.

Mother looked severely at the boy. "John might well be proud if he could do as well. I think you show a great deal of talent, Betty."

The child's anger vanished. Slowly, she smiled. "I do like to write them. Do you suppose I could ever sell any, and have them really printed?"

"I'm sure you could," said Mother, encouragingly. "And I'll be glad to help you. You needn't do any more of your penmanship exercises, or reading lessons. You read very well for your age as it is. Instead, I'd like you to write me part of a story, or a little essay every day, and I'll correct them when I come home. And be sure to look up any words you are not sure of in the dictionary."

Mother's decision appeared to Betty as a signal triumph. She had long ago wearied of the silly phrases in her script book. "Handsome is as handsome does. Children should be seen and not

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heard. Be good and let who will be clever." Writing these phrases over ten times, in a more or less vain attempt to follow the graceful swing of the Spencerian copy, impressed the little girl as the last degree of boredom. As for reading, she had no trouble with Kipling or Milton, and even took considerable pleasure in some of Shakespeare's plays, so that lessons in an ordinary "reader" were not a long-felt need.

Betty found that thinking up a new subject for almost every day kept her fairly busy. Also, Mother, for some inscrutable reason, seemed to have very little appreciation of poetry, or else Betty's endeavors in that line did not appeal to her. However, the little girl, herself, took great pleasure in writing verses, and continued to do so to a considerable extent, so that a great poet was not lost to the world through discouragement.

The young author's method of building verses was very simple. She wrote the first line, then took the last word of it, and made a row of rhymes down the side of the page, such as: time, lime, chime, dime. From these she selected whichever word appeared to her best suited to the subject matter of the poem, and then made a second line to fit it. Such matters as poetical feet did not disturb her greatly, so long as the verse seemed to flow along fairly easily.

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John felt surprise at first at the praise accorded his sister's work, and then a mild spirit of emulation, which took the form largely of satire. After much travail of spirit, he produced his first and last poem, which received the unstinted admiration of the family. There was no title. It began abruptly:

“One fine day in the middle of the night,
Two dead men got up to fight.
Three blind men came to see the fray.
The deaf and dumb guys hollered ‘hooray!’ ”

Thereafter John rested upon his literary laurels.

CHAPTER XXII

AN AUTHORESS AT LAST

THE most surprising thing about Mother's criticisms, in Betty's eyes, was the fact that she had no appreciation of realism, and apparently did not care even for excitement. Mother seemed best pleased when the little girl wrote about some small, homely thing, of no consequence to the world at large. The young author could not understand this failing in her friendly critic, but nevertheless, she humored it occasionally.

When the magazine came home that month, Mother encouraged Betty to enter the short story contest. She explained that lesser triumphs really ought to go before the greater ones. Also, she explained that she did not believe that the editor would appreciate a very deep or difficult story. It would be better to write something simple but interesting.

The subject for the month was a hunting or fishing story. Betty gave the matter her best attention. After Mother's hints, she reluctantly gave up the idea of a tiger hunt on elephants in India,

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and tried to bring her intellect to bear upon the common things of daily occurrence. Of course, there was fishing. It was good fun, too. And she had seen trout fishing, when Uncle John took her up to the mountains two years before. He had even let her hold the rod for a few minutes.

Gradually there grew up in the little girl's mind the story of the *Big Trout of Brodhead Pool*. It was the tale of how two girl chums set forth to catch a famous trout, that had eluded other campers summer after summer. They were not expert fishermen, but, depending on their remarkable luck, they had promised not to return to camp without having caught the big fish.

Alice was the impractical one of the two, so much so that she actually forgot to bring along the luncheon, which was intrusted to her keeping. Without food, except for some small fish, which they smoked over a fire of twigs, the two worked until well along in the afternoon. They were almost ready to admit themselves defeated, when suddenly the long-expected strike came. Even then, it was not until the magnificent trout leaped clear of the water, in his fight for liberty, that the girls were sure they had hooked the right one.

There followed a long and exciting fight, in which every minute the chums expected to see the line snap, or the trout leap off the hook. But at

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last, themselves almost as wet and tired as the fish, they caught him in the landing net, and brought him ashore. He was a beautiful fish, with glittering silver sides, and delicately colored gills. His size was remarkable for his species, and the girls were delighted at the idea of taking him back to camp, and being able to laugh at all the people who said that the two could not possibly catch him.

But presently, as Alice stood watching the poor fellow gasp, a shadow came over her face.—This phase of the story was quite unanticipated by the young author herself.—Alice sighed. “I wish we had a camera,” she said. “I’m afraid they won’t believe it.”

“I guess they’ll have to believe their own senses,” replied the other, scornfully.

But Alice picked up the beautiful trout, and flung him back into the pool. There was a splash, a flash of silver, and then the clear water was still.

Nobody believed the chums’ story when they returned hungry, tired, and sunburnt. They were well laughed at, and their fish story quoted as the tallest one in camp. But Alice never would admit that she was sorry for having saved the gallant fish, who had fought so bravely for his life.

Betty was quite touched by her own story. Even Mother liked it. So it was sent off by the next post.

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Then, late in November, came the first big snow, and the little girl forgot all about literary aspirations in the joy of coasting. Over on Balding Hill there was a thrilling slide down a long slope, and over a drop down onto the lake. It was possible to coast a good part of the way across the small body of water, when the ice was firm enough to make doing so reasonably safe.

Bobby Wayland attained the height of his popularity at this season, for he was the proud possessor of a big bob-sled, capable of holding six or seven children, if they crowded on tight. John and Betty always had the first right to ride, since they were Bobby's particular chums, and other children, who had no sleds, took turns on the rear seats.

Bobby was a generous child, even to the extent of letting John steer half the time. As everyone knows, there are few positions in childhood that can compare with the excitement and responsibility of steering a big coaster full of children down a bad and crowded hill. The heavy sled traveled fast, and it was difficult to avoid all the unprivileged youngsters, who were taking trips by themselves on one-passenger conveyances in the "Henry" class.

There was another big bob-sled, which liked to race with them. When a race was in progress, each sled was packed to capacity and over, for

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weight meant greater speed. An expert driver held the guide ropes of each, the sleds were lined up side by side, and a crowd of little boys pushed them both over the brink at the word of command. There was a big gum tree on the edge of the bank, which marked the finish point. But the sled which succeeded in going farthest across the lake held as high a standing as the winner in speed.

The first race of the season caused great excitement. Even Dan deserted his stand over at the station and came to take part. Dan was a big boy, and one of the best coaster drivers in the town, so that John, Betty and Bobby all rushed for him at once, and begged him to take charge of their entry. As that was just what the big boy had come over for, he agreed graciously.

There was fierce competition by the owners of the two big sleds for heavy riders. Fat boys and girls came into their own. Betty, however, made up for her lack of excessive weight by holding another child on her lap. Some of the other riders followed her example. It was the little girl's first race, and as she gazed down the glittering white hill to the darker ice of the lake, she felt just a bit nervous. However, she was wedged in so tight in the crowd on the sled, that she had little fear of falling off.

Two small boys, who had been sent down to test

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the ice, returned now, and reported that it was bearing safely. They had jumped up and down in several places without bad results. The crowd got ready; the two sled loads counted in unison, "One, two, THREE!" The boys pushed; the racers tipped over the edge, gathered speed, and whizzed down the slope.

Both sled loads cheered, the watchers shouted and ran after, the steel runners sang over the hard-packed snow. The other sled had drawn half a length ahead. The riders shouted derisively. Then they hit a patch of rough going, and slowed down. Dan avoided the patch neatly, and passed his rival. Now Dan's crew shouted and cheered. Betty held her breath, and shielded her face as well as she could from the flying bits of ice. She felt suddenly empty and queer below the belt line, but she glowed with excitement.

In a moment, the two sleds, almost even, had reached the drop to the lake. With a swoop and an echoing scream, they flashed down it, the runners almost free of the snow. A snapping crash, and they were on the lake, Dan's sled a nose ahead of the other, as they passed the gum tree. But the rival sled might yet slide to an equal victory, though Dan's crew shouted their satisfaction at having won the first point.

Then, above the shouts, there sounded a sudden

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moaning, like a hundred giants in pain. "The ice! Look out!" shouted Dan, as he steered Bobby's sled sharply around.

There was a confused and terrible sound, and then Betty found herself sprawling and breathless on the ice. A little way beyond, the other sled was just vanishing into a churning mass of dark water and broken ice. Dan had stopped quickly enough, although he had upset his passengers. The other driver had been too slow, and struck the treacherous soft patch in the middle.

A long scream of terror rose from the doomed sled, just before it disappeared, and Betty turned pale. Then the little girl saw that Dan had scrambled to his feet, and was untying their sled rope, as quickly as his fumbling fingers would allow. Forgetting aching bruises and a skinned knee, she hastened to help him. In a moment they had both ends loose, and at the same instant the supposedly drowning crew appeared with their shoulders out of water, helping each other up out of the mud. The little girl stared, amazed.

"Stand still!" Dan shouted. "If you walk, you'll get in deep. You upset right over the old road." He turned to Betty and added, "It's most always soft there. I'd o' thought the kids would try the ice that place first."

Under Dan's directions, a stick was now tied to

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one end of the rope, and while several boys held the opposite end, at a safe distance from the soft spot, the stick was thrown to the shivering boys in the water.

“One o’ you take hold at a time,” commanded the leader of the rescue party, “an’ we’ll haul you out.”

One after another, the drenched and muddy unfortunates were drawn back onto the firm ice. As each one came in, Dan sent one of the other boys to run him home as fast as he could go. Stiffness and fright were no excuses for going slowly. All were dragged along at high speed.

The big bob-sled was the only victim not recovered. In the excitement it had floated off under the ice, and was not found and dug out again until a week later. Dan received the thanks of the village for his prompt and efficient action, and a purse of ten dollars besides, which was presented with much ceremony, and appeared later as a new winter suit. It was more than a month, when the ice had hardened tight, before Balding Hill became once more popular.

Betty reached home in time for supper on the day of the accident, feeling stiff, sore and tired. Under her plate she found a small package. It was not her birthday, or any other special occasion, so that she was much surprised. Betty examined

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the mysterious parcel more closely. It was addressed to her from the magazine. The little girl flushed red, and her heart began to thump with excitement. Could it be ——

With shaking fingers, Betty tore open the wrapper, and a pretty little box fell out. In the box was a gold medal. The little girl stared at it, speechless. Mother laughed. "Look, John," she said. "Isn't it pretty?"

The boy gazed with respectful admiration. "Looks like real gold," he commented.

"Of course it is," from Betty.

"I'll give you that little gold chain of mine to wear it on," said Mother.

"Oh, that will be lovely," replied the young genius with enthusiasm.

"And," added Mother, "I'm just as proud as can be to think that we have a real authoress in the family."

CHAPTER XXIII

CHRISTMAS CHIMES

It was the second week in December, and Christmas excitement among the children was just rising to fever heat. John and Betty were both to take part in the Sunday School entertainment. John had a very sweet voice, and he was to sing a little song all by himself,—except for the lady who played the piano,—about that Lass of Richmond Hill. While Betty, on account of her engaging dimples and fair curls, was to be the Queen of Christmas.

Mother was making Betty a beautiful little scarlet dress, covered with downy, white cotton snow, and glittering with spangles like bits of shiny ice, in which the little girl was to hold high court on Christmas Eve. Betty was to have a throne in the middle of the platform, and a ring of tiny little people had to dance around her, singing, “We are the seconds, etc.” Then there would be another ring of children about Betty’s own size, who were to be minutes. And finally great big people of thirteen and fourteen were to be the hours. The

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seconds, minutes and hours all had their own songs, which they were painfully learning at the rehearsals twice a week. Betty loved the rehearsals. She knew all the words and music, and she helped everybody sing.

Then all the children took part in the play of the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. It was an enormous big shoe made of cardboard, and painted on the outside. All the children got behind it, and sang about how "she had so many children, she didn't know what to do." There was a hole in the shoe in one place, and all the more adventurous took turns poking their heads through it.

Besides the excitement of the coming entertainment, John and Betty had the thrills that come from choosing what you'll buy for Mother's Christmas present. They had more money this year than ever before, for there were nearly sixty dollars in the bank. They were afraid to spend more than half of it on Christmas on account of Billy's expenses, but still thirty dollars ought to get something very beautiful for Mother.

There were so many things that Mother needed this year, that she could not afford to buy for herself. But at last the children decided on a new warm winter coat. Mother's old coat was too thin, and she shivered and coughed on cold days. Mother had sold her furs, and so they could not

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help out. Betty was very thoughtful on this day. Then at last she said, "Do you s'pose we could get Mamma a fur coat with that much money? It would be so much warmer."

"I don't know," replied John, doubtfully. "We could ask Peter about it. He knows most anything."

So Peter Wayland was consulted, and when he found out who the coat was for, and how Mother coughed on cold days, he agreed to take the children in to the furrier's, where his sister had always dealt, and he said he was quite sure they could find something very nice for thirty dollars. The very next day he kept his promise.

Betty was quite overwhelmed and John bewildered by the wonderful array of handsome furs in the city shop. They were overcome by awe before the very fashionable saleslady who bowed and smiled such a lot. At last Betty picked out a coat of beautiful soft brown fur, with a big collar, that would turn clear up around your ears. She and John agreed that it was quite the nicest in the shop. Then Betty had a misgiving. "How much is it?" she asked.

Peter Wayland whispered something to the salesperson. Then he looked at the tag on the coat. "Twenty-five dollars," he said.

The little girl beamed with relief. "We'll take

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it," she said. "And maybe we could get a hat to go with it with the rest of the money."

Peter agreed, and they picked out a lovely little brown fur toque, that just matched the coat. Betty gave Mr. Wayland the thirty dollars, and while he arranged about the sale, they walked about, and looked at some of the other things in the shop. Betty found a case full of furs just for little boys and girls, and a moment after her gaze lighted upon it, she stood entranced before a vision of beauty. It was a set of white ermine furs, with little black tails. There was a nice fuzzy piece to go around one's neck, and keep one's ears warm, and then there was a lovely little muff, trimmed with an ermine head with very red glass eyes, that hung by a silk cord for one's hands. Betty turned to a saleslady. "How much is that?" she asked.

"Eighty-five dollars," replied the lady, smiling.

The little girl gasped, and turned to John. "I guess that coat for Mamma was very reasonable," she said.

"What's that?" asked Peter, coming up.

"Mamma's coat must have been a bargain, because they're asking eighty-five dollars for those," and she pointed to the white furs.

Peter hemmed. "Well, you see, there's a difference in color," he said.

"Ye-es," agreed Betty, doubtfully.

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Now that Mother's Christmas present was all ready, the great day could not come fast enough to suit the children. Betty marked off the days on the calendar every morning, and counted how many were left. And a couple of times every day, one of them stole softly up-stairs to the attic, and peeked into the big old trunk in the far corner to make certain that the precious packages were safe.

On the morning that Betty counted just one more day to Christmas, the excitement had become tremendous. Mother had to stay at the office only until noon that day, and the Sunday School entertainment came that night. When the children were hitching Billy up, to take Mother in to the station, John slipped his axe into the back of the buggy. "We can cut our own tree down in the woods for a surprise," he said.

His sister beamed. "Sometimes you do think of things," she said. "And there's the old tree holder Mother brought, up in the attic, and some balls and tinsel, and things. We can make it beautiful. Maybe we could find some holly and mistletoe in the woods, too, and fix everything up."

"Maybe."

With Mother safely off on the train, the children stopped to speak to Dan, before starting for the woods. Betty was shocked to observe that his right eye was all swollen and black and blue. "You've

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been fighting again," she said, with stern disapproval.

"Haven't either," sullenly.

"Then where'd you get the black eye?"

Dan glowered, and felt of the injured member gingerly. "Pop come home last night, and beat me up. He hit Ma over the head with the poker, too. I'm goin' t' lick the tar outta Pop, when I'm big enough," and he clenched his fists.

Betty was shocked.

"Where's your pop been all this time?" asked John.

"Jail. An' I wish he was there or somewheres else now."

Betty had recovered her breath by now. "Does he hit you all the time, when he's home?" she asked.

Dan nodded gloomily. "And Ma has to work extra hard t' feed him, too, an' when he gets to feelin' good, he hits her too for fun, to make her cry."

Betty turned pale, and then she flushed very red. "That's terrible!" she said. Then after a moment's thought, "I'm going to tell Peter. *He'll* settle him."

Dan brightened slightly. "Pop's terrible tough," he said, doubtfully.

John threw his shoulders back. "Peter's awful strong. You ought to see him throw dumb-bells

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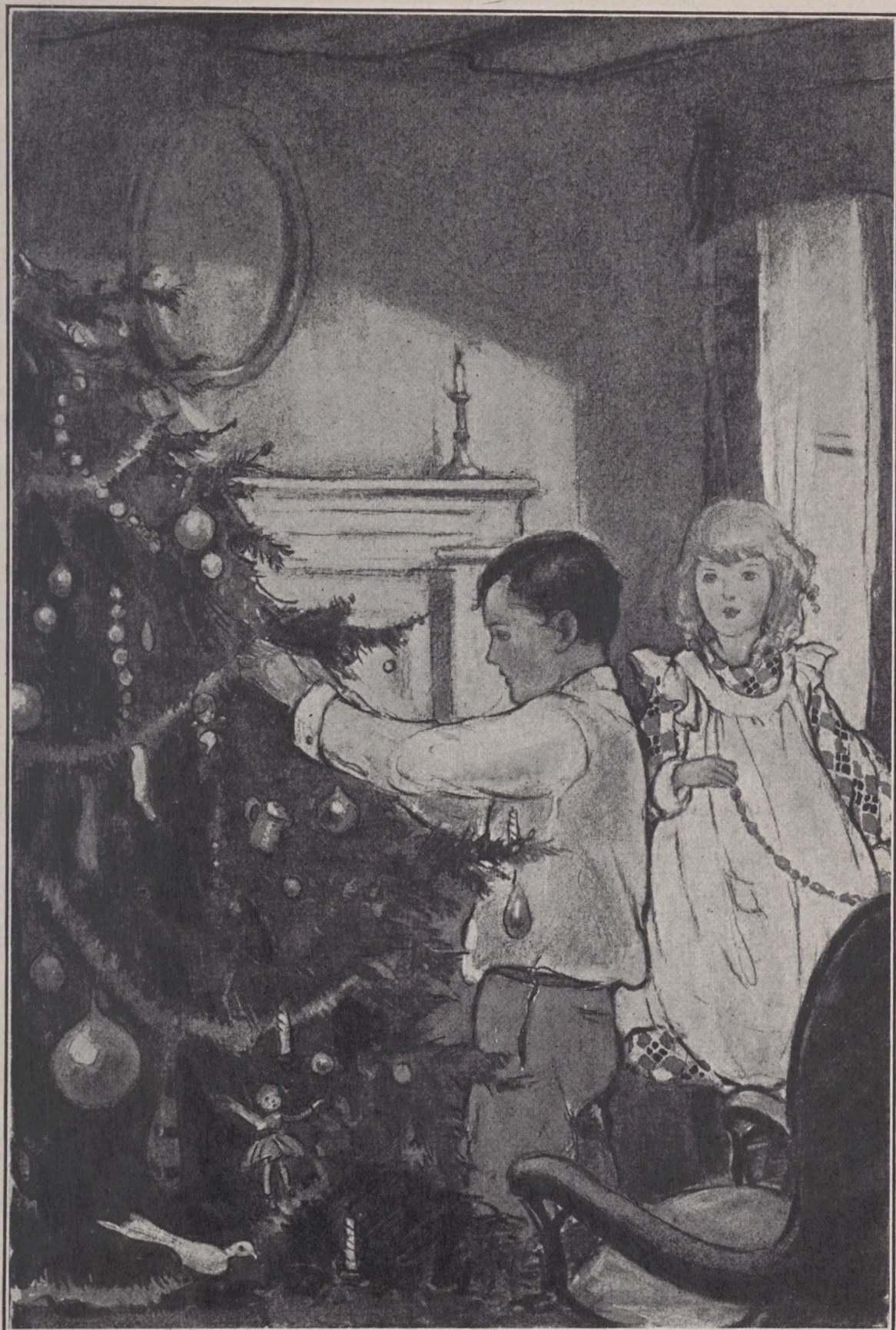
around, and whop a punching bag. I guess if your pop was to act mean, he'd knock him out just like that," and John gave a vigorous punch at an imaginary foe.

Before going down to the woods, John and Betty stopped at the Waylands', and told Peter all about the sad case. Peter agreed with them that nobody had a right to act like Dan's father, and he said he would see that the sheriff put a stop to it right away.

The children thanked him warmly, and then drove back to give Dan the cheerful news.

It took John and Betty quite a while to select a little pine tree, which was just the right size, bushy, and covered with pretty little cones. And then it required time and patience to make a neat job of chopping the tough trunk. But at last the task was accomplished, and the small tree tied fast to the back of the buggy, as it was too large to go inside. The children succeeded in finding some pretty holly, with plenty of bright red berries, and even a little bunch of mistletoe. And then they hurried for home so as to reach the house before Mother.

Mother went shopping in the city instead of coming straight home that day, so that the children had time to decorate the walls with holly and hang the mistletoe over the door. Betty found the tree-



IT LOOKED QUITE GAY

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stand and trimmings in the attic, and they set the tree up beside the fireplace in the parlor. It looked quite gay, when they had put on all the balls and tinsel, and the aromatic fragrance was delicious. Then they brought in logs from the woodpile, and built a big Christmas fire, in the open fireplace, and threw in some dried pine cones, which they had brought with them from the woods, because the cones smelled so sweet when they burned.

A little later Mother reached home, carrying a lot of mysterious packages, which she insisted on locking up in her room, before doing anything else. Mother was delighted with all the decorations, and she could not say enough about how clever the children had been, to think of it and do it all themselves.

Betty told Mother about Dan's father, too, and Mother was very sorry for Dan, and glad that the children had tried to help.

Supper was a hasty meal, because everybody was anxious to get ready for the big entertainment that night.

Betty was quite rosy with excitement when Mother had buttoned her into the little scarlet Christmas queen dress. Mother put the gilt crown, which went with the costume, into her bag until they should arrive. John hugged his music roll

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tight under his arm, and he cleared his throat a great many times, but he said he hadn't any cold, and did not feel a bit nervous. His sister looked at him a bit suspiciously, but she did not say anything. She felt rather that way herself. And of course, singing all alone was a great deal worse than doing it with a lot of other people.

Most people had gathered early at the church, where the Christmas celebration was to be given, so there was quite a crowd when Mother and the children arrived. Mother stopped to speak to an acquaintance in the vestibule, and the children slipped inside to see how things looked. At first all their attention was taken by the gorgeous red curtain hung in front of the platform at the far end of the room, and by the two beautiful Christmas trees set at each end of the platform. The trees were almost as high as the ceiling; spangled angels seemed to be just flying over them, and the green branches glittered from top to bottom with many colored little lights. Betty sighed with delight. "It's just like heaven," she said.

"I guess that's candy underneath," said practical John.

Betty looked down, and sure enough there were pyramids of little white boxes, tied with red Christmas ribbon. "I'm glad there's lots of it," she said. "I wish I had a piece now."

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“Hello,” said a new voice.

The children looked, and saw Dan. He had a clean white bandage over his injured eye, so he did not look so bad.

“Mr. Wayland asked me t’ come an’ get some candy,” he explained.

“That’s fine,” said John. “Did he fix your pop all right?”

Dan nodded. “Brought the sheriff down, an’ told Pop if he didn’t behave, he’d got to quit town or be arrested. Pop was awful mad, but he didn’t dast t’ do anything.”

Betty smiled. “Peter’s really a lot of use,” she said. “It seems funny that we used not to like him.”

“Well, that was when he was trying to marry Mamma,” explained John.

“Ye-es,” agreed Betty, doubtfully. And then quickly, “I’m going to be Queen of Christmas, Dan.”

“Didn’t know there was a queen to Christmas,” replied Dan. “Thought there was just Santa Claus.”

“Well, there is a queen,” firmly, “because I’m it. And John’s going to sing a song, and why don’t you come up and do something, Dan? You could be one of the children in the old lady’s shoe, and poke your head out of the window.”

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But Dan declined bashfully this chance for fame, and Mother appeared, and took John and Betty back to the dressing-room, where the performers were getting ready. Mother took off Betty's coat and hat, smoothed her fair curls gently, and adjusted the golden crown. Everybody thought Betty looked beautiful and angelic. Betty thought so, too, when she looked in the mirror. And even Mrs. Patterson, who had been very stern since the circus episode, softened up, and was quite agreeable.

And then a little bell rang, the curtain was drawn aside and the performance began. There were some recitations, a parade of little girls with flags, and then John sang his little song. Even his sister admitted that he had a very sweet voice. It made her think of "Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest," in the old hymn. Everybody clapped very loud, when John finished, and he bowed just as if he was used to it. And when he came back off the platform, a lot of ladies told him he had a wonderful voice, and some of them kissed him, and that made him flush very red.

Then a big boy recited "From Ghent to Aix," and at last the curtain was drawn together again, and Betty's gilded throne set up. The little girl felt as proud as all the queens of Europe when the curtains unclosed again, and displayed her seated

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in regal splendor. Betty appeared quite calm, but really her heart was beating like a trip-hammer with excitement, while the "seconds, minutes and hours" danced and sang around her. Finally they finished, and the curtain swung to as they trooped away. But people clapped so hard that the curtain was opened again, and Betty smiled and nodded while the lesser fry bowed their acknowledgments.

The old lady who lived in a shoe came next, and when that was over, all the children were taken down to sit in the first three rows of seats, which had been reserved for them. The church was darkened, all except a soft light in front of the curtains. And then a young lady came out and recited, "It was the night before Christmas," in such an exciting, creepy way that Betty's heart went pitty-pat. And just as she finished the last line, the lights flashed on again, the curtains were flung open, and there was Santa Claus himself in his sleigh, drawn by reindeer. The deer were not prancing, but they looked very real.

Santa Claus gave a cheerful halloo in a deep voice, and everybody cheered and clapped wildly. Then Santa climbed out of his sleigh, and said he was going to give everyone a box of candy, and then they must go home, and hang up their stockings, and pop into bed, and in the morning, all the

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good little boys and girls would find what they wanted waiting for them. Everybody clapped again, and then Santa handed out the candy. Betty peered sharply up into Santa's face. Of course, the nose wasn't like, because it was so big and red, but somehow the twinkle in his eyes reminded her of Peter. Betty was severely tempted to repeat, "Peter picked a peck of pickled peppers," but nobly refrained. She merely contracted her angelic countenance into a look of extreme knowingness. Santa gave her a warning glance. "I said all the *good* little boys and girls would get what they wanted," he reminded.

It was only nine o'clock when John, Betty and Mother reached home again, but the children pretended they were tired, and hurried off to bed, after hanging their largest stockings to the mantel in the parlor. When Mother had kissed them good-night, and gone down-stairs again, they stole softly up to the attic, and got the two precious packages. These they had marked that morning, "For Mamma, with lots and lots of love, from John and Betty." They hid the packages under Betty's bed, because her spread reached clear to the floor, so no one could see under. Then the children crept back into bed, and lay quiet, listening.

After a while, Mother came softly up-stairs, and tiptoed into each of their rooms in turn to look at

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them. The children lay as still as mice, and breathed deeply, as if asleep. Mother seemed satisfied, and went into her room and closed the door. John and Betty could hear her moving softly about in there. A moment later, the children were stealing barefoot down the back stairs, carrying the packages. They reached the parlor through the hall in safety, and laid the boxes at the foot of the Christmas tree. Betty put a sprig of holly on top.

And then the door-bell rang suddenly and loudly. The children's hearts seemed to jump into their mouths, and they had just time to dart back through the hall, before Mother started downstairs. They ran up the back stairs, as Mother came down the front, rushed into their rooms, jumped into bed, pulled up the covers, and lay panting and listening. They felt it would have been awful to be caught fixing Mother's Christmas presents. Mother opened the front door, and the children heard her say, "Why, you're just covered with snow!"

Snowing! A white Christmas! The children's eyes sparkled.

"It's not bad yet," replied Peter's voice. Then lower, "Are the youngsters asleep yet?"

"I think so, but you never can be sure," replied Mother.

"Well, look. It's for them."

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“ Oh, isn't it a beauty! ” cried Mother.

The children fairly tingled with curiosity.

“ Do you think they'll like it? ” asked Peter.

“ They'll be perfectly delighted! ”

“ What do you s'pose it is? ” asked Betty, in a stage whisper.

“ Don't know. Listen! ” replied John.

Mother and Peter were talking again. “ I'm a little worried about Bobby,” he was saying. “ He went out with his sled when it started to snow. It was ten when I came over, and he wasn't back yet. Half-past now. I guess I'll find him in when I get home. I just thought he might have taken it into his head to come over here for a few minutes, but I didn't see him on the way.”

“ If Bobby does come, I'll see that he gets home again safely,” promised Mother.

“ Thank you,” said Peter.

It seemed to take the two a long time to say good-night, but at last Peter left with a cheerful “ Merry Christmas.”

“ Merry Christmas,” replied Mother.

Betty stretched herself out with a long sigh of content. “ John? ” she called softly.

“ Yes? ”

“ I feel just like an angel.”

“ So do I.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LOST IS FOUND

It seemed about ten minutes later that John was shaking his sister by the arm. Betty opened her eyes with difficulty. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Merry Christmas," whispered John. "It's six o'clock."

In an instant Betty was wide awake. She slipped on her shoes and a woolly bathrobe, trying hard not to shiver out loud, and the two stole softly down-stairs.

The dawn had not come yet, but the white snow on the ground reflected the dim light from the sky, so that there was a gray twilight outside by which you could see. John and Betty gently drew the parlor curtains up as far as they would go, and then they brought their stockings over by the windows, so that they could see to unpack. The stockings were delightfully and mysteriously lumpy.

"Let's take turns opening," suggested Betty. "Then it'll last longer. You can start," generously.

John hastily pulled open his first parcel, and

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inside he found a pair of warm knitted gloves, marked "With love, from Aunt Mary." While her brother tried them on, Betty opened her first parcel, and found another pair like them, except that her gloves were smaller, and blue in color instead of brown. Then John found two new neckties, one of them a beautiful shade of red. The red one he tied on around his pajama collar. And his sister's next package held two satin hair ribbons, one rose color and the other blue. Then there were candy and oranges, and two candy canes carefully wrapped up, and finally two dear little boxes clear down in the toe. John's held the prettiest silver watch with a silver chain to go with it, and Betty's had a dainty gold ring set with three of the loveliest little white seed pearls. These were from Mother, and it was some time before the children could turn from admiring them to open the last two big parcels under the Christmas tree.

At last, however, Betty opened her box marked from Uncle John. She had great hopes of it, because she had written her uncle this year that she did not want any more dolls, but regular boy's things; something that would go. There was a lot of packing in the box, but presently the little girl had it out, and then she drew out a curious cylindrical object with wheels and valves. John looked eagerly. "It's a gasoline engine," he said de-

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lightedly. "We can have lots of fun with it. Bobby told me all about 'em. They'll pull elevators up and down, and all kinds of things, if you put a string over the wheel."

Betty beamed. "That's fine. Now you try your big one."

John's bundle was long like an umbrella, but when he got it open, what he saw was a gray cloth case with several compartments in it. In each opening was a polished bamboo stick, with metal pieces on the end, and round wires attached to the sides. The two children were puzzled.

"It isn't golf clubs," said Betty, doubtfully.

And then John pulled out a round metal object that worked with a handle, and on it was wound a lot of twine. Suddenly a light of understanding came into his eyes. "Hurrah!" he shouted. "It's a regular rod and reel! See, It all fits together." And he attached the metal pieces until he had one long tapering rod. The reel fitted into a slide in the handle. John promptly began to whip an imaginary pool.

But Betty was thoughtful. Finally, "Did you notice? There wasn't anything marked from Peter?"

John stopped whipping for a moment. "That's so."

"I wonder ——" The light was growing

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stronger, and the little girl peered keenly all around the room. Suddenly she gasped and caught her brother's arm. "John! Look! There's something behind the door!"

Sure enough something gleamed there, catching a ray of the first sunlight. There followed a rush for the door, and the excited children pulled out a beautiful bob-sled marked for John and Betty from Peter Wayland.

"It's a peach!" said John.

"You bet!" agreed Betty, forgetting to talk carefully in her enthusiasm.

And it was. It was a flexible flyer, with two sets of steel runners, and a regular steering wheel to guide it. The body was big enough to hold four or five children coasting. The name Lightning was painted on it in gold letters.

"I bet she goes like lightning, too," said John.

"I'm awf'ly glad it snowed last night," from Betty.

"So'm I."

And at this point Mother appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Merry Christmas!" cried both children, each trying to get ahead of the other, and they dashed up-stairs and hugged Mother until she could hardly breathe.

"Help!" cried Mother, laughing breathlessly.

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The strong young arms relaxed, and two rosy faces were held up for kisses. This ceremony over with, each youngster seized one of Mother's arms, and they proceeded to hale her away down-stairs to the parlor, both talking at once.

"The ring is beautiful," said Betty.

"And the watch an' chain," from John.

"And I got a gas'line engine ——"

"And a fishing rod 'n' reel ——"

"Gloves 'n' ——"

"Ties!"

"And a sled!" both together.

And with that they all three rushed into the parlor. Mother admired everything just as if she had not seen it all last night. And then the children made her sit down, and brought her the precious packages to open. It was a rule that Mother couldn't open anything from the children until Christmas morning. Half the joy of the day would have been gone if they could not see Mother's pleased surprise.

Mother started with the smaller box, and when she had carefully opened it, saving the pretty string, she certainly was surprised to see the pretty brown fur toque. Mother kissed both the children, and they made her try the hat on. It was certainly becoming, but Mother scolded them for having spent so much of their hard earned money on her.

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"It didn't cost so awf'ly much," protested Betty.

And then Mother opened the big box, and when she saw the lovely fur coat, she fairly gasped. "Gracious, children!" she said. "Did you break a bank?"

John and Betty laughed. "Try it on!" they cried.

Mother did so, but with a thoughtful look in her face. She looked quite another person, all dressed up. She was so pretty that she quite took even the children's breath away. And if Peter had seen her that way, he would have had to propose again on the spot.

Betty smiled with satisfaction. "Well, Peter *has* good taste," she said.

"Peter!" from Mother. She flushed. "You mean Mr. Wayland?"

"Yes. He took us to the city, where his sister buys, and helped us pick it out. It was quite a bargain."

A light of understanding came into Mother's eyes, but she did not seem altogether pleased. In fact she frowned. "I see. Well, I'll have to talk to Mr. Wayland about it."

Betty was puzzled. "He was very nice."

Mother smiled again. "Of course, you wouldn't know."

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“ Know what? ”

But Mother would not tell. She took off the coat and hat, and put them carefully back in the boxes, to keep them from getting mussed, she said.

Right after breakfast John and Betty put on their new gloves, and went out to try the beautiful sled. The polished runners fairly slipped along over the snow, and John gave Betty a quick ride up the street. Betty was just going to give him one in return, when a crowd of little boys came along the road. The children generally had nothing to do with the rough little boys on the street, but this time the boys seemed to be so excited that John became curious.

“ What’s the matter? ” he called.

“ Bobby Wayland’s lost.”

“ What! ” together.

“ They think Dan Wilson’s pop kidnapped ’im for revenge,” delightedly, for it was quite a dime novel thrill. “ They’ve been huntin’ all night, but the snow’s covered all the footprints, ’n’ they can’t find ’im.”

John and Betty flew for home. A few excited words told Mother of the accident, and then the children were off as fast as they could go for the town. Here the story was confirmed. Bobby had been out sledding, and failed to return. They found his sled at the foot of a hill, but he had dis-

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appeared. Mr. Wilson had been around town the evening before, saying he was going to get even with that "smart Aleck" preacher. Now he had disappeared, too, and it was supposed he had stolen Bobby Wayland. Searchers had been out all night led by Peter, but had found nothing. The alarm had been sent out in every direction.

John and Betty looked very solemn.

"Poor Bobby!" said Betty, with a quivery sigh.

John blew his nose very hard.

The two no longer felt like playing with their new sled. They sat sadly on the edge of the station platform, and thought. Presently Betty shivered. "Bobby might freeze to death, if Mr. Wilson didn't kill him first," she said.

Her brother shuddered. "Don't talk like that."

"Well, he might."

"We—we got to do something." Brightening, "Let's pretend I'm Sherlock Holmes, and you're ——"

"No, I won't be Watson," protested the little girl, firmly. "He wasn't a bit smart and he didn't do anything except write. I think he was horrid. We'll both be Sherlock."

"All right," agreed John, resignedly. "We can call you Sherlock, and me Holmes."

"All right. But now we got to think where Mr. Wilson could have hidden Bobby."

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There ensued a deep silence. At last, "Mr. Mann's barn's a good place to hide," from John.

"They'd o' found him there long ago!" scornfully.

"Well, where'd you hunt, *Sherlock*?"

"Maybe the woods."

"They been huntin' there all night an' mornin'."

"Ye-es,—but ——" And then a light came into her face. "I got an idea. Where'd we hide him that time?"

"You mean the ——"

"Yes. S-sh!" mysteriously. "You see that's way out from town, and it wouldn't be snowing in there. Everybody's been looking in the woods down toward Wilson's, and maybe they haven't tried out there yet."

John's eyes gleamed. "We might take Pathfinder. I guess Dan would let us," he suggested.

"But don't tell Dan our idea," warned Betty. "Bobby mayn't be there, but I think he is. Prob'ly Mr. Wilson locked him in, an' then went off'n left him. He couldn't get away with Bobby along, you know, and everybody looking."

This struck John as sound logic. "Then we can rescue him all by ourselves," he said, feeling the attraction of glory.

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His sister nodded.

Dan was at home, lying down. He had been out hunting for Bobby with Path-finder since two in the morning, and was very tired.

"You can have the dog, if you want," Dan agreed. "But I don't think it'll be any good. There's so much snow fell last night he can't smell nothin'. I think Pop's got clear off."

"We can try anyway," John said. "We'll bring Path-finder back all right."

Dan stuck his hand in his pocket. "Here's one of the kid's mittens. I had it last night. Let the pup smell it before you start huntin' for a trail."

"Thanks," said John, and took it.

Mrs. Wilson was over at a neighbor's, so there was no one to question the children as they set out on their search. Path-finder moved along willingly on his rope leash; he did not seem to be specially tired. The children talked cheerfully about what great detectives they were, and gave each other rides alternately on the sled. But when they came at last into the fringe of woods before the lake, they fell silent. In fact, all at once they felt a little afraid.

The underbrush was very thick, and the snow had not sifted through heavily. "Maybe Path-finder could smell something here," whispered Betty.

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John took out Bobby's mitten, and let the dog smell it. Then, "Go find," he commanded.

Path-finder began to sniff along the ground. And then presently he gave a low woof, and began to pull hard on his leash. The children's hearts gave a great jump, and they exchanged glances. The dog was leading straight along the path toward where the old boat used to be. And then on the leeward side of a big bush they saw the mark of a big foot still clear in the shallow snow, and beside it a little one. In the heel of the small footprint was a heart-shaped indentation.

The children stopped dead. "That's his new boots," whispered Betty. "Don't you remember the heart?"

John nodded.

Both children were pale, and panting a little, though they had not been running.

"I guess we better leave Path-finder here," said Betty at last, softly. "Dan wouldn't like it, if anything happened to him."

John's heart gave an extra hard thump almost up into his mouth, while his sister tied the dog to a stout bush. "D'you think *he's* still there?" he asked, with an effort.

"I don't know."

John gulped. "Had we better get somebody else to help?"

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Betty hesitated and then shook her head. "It's a long way back, and maybe *he* might kill Bobby while we were gone. Maybe Mr.—you know—will really be gone when we get there." She dared not pronounce the fateful name.

John squared his shoulders. "Well, let's get clubs."

They hunted about, and selected the two heaviest sticks they could find, testing them against the ground to make sure they were not rotten. Thus armed, the two felt a little better, though they both wished silently that they had the old rifle from the attic along, and a few husky people like Peter, the sheriff and Dan.

And then the shore of the lake came in sight. They stopped abruptly; the boat was gone! "It's sunk!" whimpered Betty, and they both ran down to look.

Then around a little cape of land, they caught a glimpse of the missing boat. It was frozen up almost in the middle of the small lake. Some fall storm had loosened it from its moorings, and it had been floating up and down until caught firmly by the ice. The boat looked far more dilapidated than before. Most of the railing was gone from the back, but it still floated high.

The children stood quite still, and stared out at the boat intently. They saw no sign of life and

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heard nothing except the sough of the wind through the trees at their backs. John breathed a sigh half of relief. "I don't believe there's anything there after all," he said. "Prob'ly they came this way, but they must have gone further."

Betty cheered up visibly. "Well, we might take a look—just to make sure," she suggested, for she hated to turn back without having done anything. "And then we can go home, 'n' have lunch. It's getting awful late, and Mother'll be worried."

John gazed up at the sky, and saw that it was fully noon, for the winter sun stood overhead. "All right," he agreed. "We better hurry. I'm hungry."

"So'm I."

John clutched his stick firmly, and tested the ice next the bank with it. "Ice's good and thick here," he announced, cheerfully, and stepped down upon it.

Betty followed him with the sled.

At first the two slid along almost gaily, though they did not talk or laugh out loud. But as they came nearer to the old boat, talk died out altogether, and an eerie feeling came over them. Betty felt as if a cold earthworm were wiggling up and down her back. A sensation of positive dread came over the two as they slowly approached the rear of the boat.

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They set their feet down softly, and the faint grating of the sled seemed like a loud alarm. They would have turned back, but neither was willing to appear a coward before the other.

And then they heard a faint crying sound. Betty caught John's arm. They halted, staring with dilated eyes. Perhaps it was just the wind, or their fancy. But no. It came a little louder, and then stopped. It was quite near them; it was on the boat.

The children exchanged glances. And then John bent toward Betty, until his lips were just next her ear. "*He's there too.*" He spoke in just a breath. "I see his foot."

Betty looked, and sure enough, amongst the wreckage of the rail an old boot appeared around the corner of the cabin. It moved just a trifle. Mr. Wilson was evidently lying down. The little girl prayed he was asleep.

John spoke again in the same low murmur. "This is a man's job. I'm going to try to let Bobby out. You keep back, and if *he* starts after us, run for all you're worth, and get Peter."

Betty nodded. For the first time in her life she failed to argue.

John now stole forward as softly as an Indian, and Betty disobeyed one of his commands, for she crept after him. Now they could see almost all of

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Mr. Wilson, as he sprawled on the deck alongside the cabin. He was covered with a couple of horse blankets, and a bottle stood beside him. His face was very red, and he snored occasionally. John approached the cabin from the side farthest from the dread figure, but the boat was so small that the boy was perilously near as he stepped gingerly aboard. The boat canted over a little, as the new weight came upon it, and Mr. Wilson's bottle slid up against the cabin side with a thump. The man snorted and moved. Both children crouched low and kept perfectly still. Presently the snoring began again.

John moved forward a step or two to the cabin door. It was bolted. Very gently he began to work at the rusty old bolt. He must slide it back, so that it would not squeak and give the alarm. It seemed ages to Betty while John slowly drew the bolt back. Her heart felt as if it were throbbing in her throat, but she had almost forgotten to be afraid. She was watching the sleeping man with all her eyes. Her stick was clenched firmly in her two hands. She had made up her mind, if Mr. Wilson woke, to hit him as hard as she could. He shouldn't get John and Bobby.

And then at last the bolt was back far enough, and John gently pulled open the cabin door. In the gloom within he could just make out a huddled

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form in the far corner, a white face, and two staring eyes. John raised his fingers to his lips. Bobby choked back a cry of surprise and relief, and crawled slowly to the door. He was so stiff with cold he could not walk. At the door John put his arm around the other boy, and helped him to the edge of the boat. The little girl hung to the side of the boat with all her might to keep it from jolting, while John lowered Bobby onto the sled, and then slipped to the ice himself.

Betty started at once to draw the sled toward the nearest shore. At first they moved slowly and softly, with John behind as rear guard. But when they were a few yards away, John whispered to Bobby, "Hold on for your life!" Then he took hold of the sled rope with Betty, and they ran as fast as they could go.

Bobby lay on the sled full length, and gripped the sides with his numb fingers. Betty glanced behind just once, but saw nothing. Then she looked ahead, and almost halted. "It's thin!" she said.

John slowed up. They had made straight for the shore instead of going the roundabout way they had come. Just ahead for several yards before the bank, the ice had been protected from the full sweep of the wind. It was thin and dark. And with a shock the children remembered that

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here was the deepest part of the lake. "Potter's hole," whispered Betty, with pale lips.

Her brother glanced back. He saw they would have to return some distance to go around the other way. "We've got to chance it," he said. "Betty, you take the front end of the rope. I'll take the middle. Then we won't all come on the same ice at once." Betty obeyed. "Now hang on!" to Bobby.

With a rush they were out on the treacherous ice. The thin footing quivered and quaked under their advance. Cracks ran out in every direction, and a great moaning echoed from bank to bank like the ravings of a hungry monster. Chasms opened before the little girl; she slipped and slid as she jumped across. A fleeting recollection of Eliza passed across her mind in the midst of the hurry. She wondered if Eliza had been able to swim, or could only paddle like herself. And then her foot touched the bank; the other was on, and then there sounded just behind her a splash. Quick as a wink, Betty leaned forward and pulled. There came a great jerk on the rope; the little girl could hardly hold on; and then John had drawn his leg clear of the water and reached shore. In a moment they had pulled the sled free of the rotten ice, up the bank and onto the old cow-path running through the woods.

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The children dared not look back. Mr. Wilson must have wakened when the thin ice groaned; he must be after them. Panting, they rushed through the woods on the old short cut home. Not until they had crossed the little frozen brook, passed the last tree, and gone half-way across the first field, did they slacken pace to breathe. Betty felt as if her short legs were weighted with lead, and as if she could never get enough air into her lungs again. And then Bobby slid off the sled, and lay limp in the snow. The children paused in consternation, and forgot all about being worn out.

John turned Bobby over, and listened to his heart. The older boy's face cleared. "He's all right. He's just fainted like Addie Smith did that day in Sunday School. But he's terrible cold."

Betty helped John put the little boy back on the sled. Then John took off his coat, spread it over Bobby, and tied the arms under the sled. Betty did the same with hers, tying it lower down. Then they picked up the rope and ran on again. "We'll have t-to hurry, so we w-won't catch c-cold," shivered Betty.

It took the children some time to lift the sled and its burden over the low orchard fence, but they did not worry a great deal, as they saw no avenging Mr. Wilson in pursuit. Once over, they hurried up through the orchard toward the house.

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Mother had been watching anxiously for the children's return, for she could not imagine their intentionally missing a good Christmas dinner. She saw them coming through the orchard. And then she glimpsed the bundle on the sled, perceived the youngsters' coatless condition, and guessed what they had. In a moment she ran out to meet them, slipped Bobby out from under the coats, and carried him into the house. John and Betty paused to untie their coats, and then followed.

Mother had laid Bobby on the couch. "Fill the hot-water bottles," she ordered Betty. "Get blankets," she said to John. And while they hastened to obey, Mother herself mixed a hot drink, and began to feed it to Bobby with a spoon. It was difficult at first to get it through the boy's shut teeth, but presently some dribbled through. Bobby swallowed, and then his muscles relaxed a little, and his teeth opened. The rest went down more easily, and his eyes were open, and a little color coming into his face, by the time they had applied the hot-water bottles, and wrapped him in warm blankets. Bobby could not help whimpering a little from pain, as he began to warm up. Mother heated some milk, and he drank it ravenously, for he was very hungry.

Mother turned at last to John and Betty. "Get something hot to drink," she bade them. "And

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then take Billy, and go tell Pete—Mr. Wayland—that Bobby is all right.”

The children drank some hot milk, and then hurried to obey. Billy was harnessed in record time, and in a few minutes they were driving fast up the road. They had not gone far, when they saw a little group of men, who seemed to be searching for something in a field.

“There’s the sheriff,” said Betty, and pulled up.

John leaned far out. “He’s found!” he shouted.

“Where? Who ——”

“Wilson had him in the old boat down on the lake,” cried John. “We left Path-finder tied down in the woods. He’ll show you where Wilson is, if he’s started away.” And with a slap of the lines they were off again, leaving a torrent of questions behind.

They did not stop to inform any more people, but drove straight to Peter Wayland’s. The young minister had just come in from searching, in order to learn the news, and to help concert new measures for continuing the hunt more thoroughly. The children saw him on the porch, and hailed him loudly. Peter ran down to them hastily. “Any news?” he called.

“Bobby’s found,” shouted John.

“We found him,” explained his sister. And in

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answer to Peter's mute inquiry, "He's all right, and he's at our house."

"Mother sent us to tell you," finished John.

With a jump Peter was in the carriage. The children moved over to make room for him. "Let me drive," he said, in a smothered sort of voice. Betty handed over the lines, and then the surprised Billy received a slap, which made him step out for all he was worth.

Betty was on the outside, and she had to hold on as tight as she could to keep from slipping, as the carriage rattled and swayed over the snowy ruts. And then Peter began asking questions about how it all happened. The children told him, but they all had to talk in shouts in order to make each other hear. When they had finished, they were home, and Peter pulled up. He jumped out of the carriage, and then he turned to John and Betty, and said very solemnly, "I'll never forget what you've done to-day, and I'll be grateful all my life." And then he hurried up on the porch. The front door was not locked, and he went right in, closing it after him.

The children paused to throw a blanket over Billy, so he would not catch cold, and they tied the lines around the hitching post. Then they followed Peter. At the door of the parlor they paused. Mother was sitting by the open fire, her eyes all

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soft and shiny. And Bobby, wrapped in a blanket, was lying asleep on Mother's lap. And Peter was kneeling beside them, hugging the two of them up in his strong young arms, and saying, "My darlings!" over and over. Then he kissed Mother over Bobby's tousled red head.

John and Betty retired silently to the kitchen, whither a pleasant odor invited them. Each carefully selected a drum stick from the pot. John carefully balanced his piece of chicken, so that the gravy would not drip on his trousers, and then he gave his sister an inquiring look.

Betty nodded her head. She took another bite of chicken, swallowed it, and then declared herself, generously. "I guess I don't mind—so long as it's Peter."

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